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Changing the Fourth Estate

ESSAYS ON SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM

Edited by Adrian Hadland

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After little more than ten years of democracy in South Africa, the need for quality journalism is as urgent and important now as it has ever been. Certainly the context has changed – and radically. No longer do the media confront a state that is guilty of the constant and systematic abuse of universal human rights. Neither do the media need to contend with the deliberate division of society into inequitable racial enclaves. The shroud of secrecy that once hid the opaque, frequently clandestine, manipulation of power has fallen away. But democracy in a developing context brings with it new challenges for the media.

There are constitutional rights to service, including ordinary people's access to information, the right to cultural self-expression as well as access to the media itself. There are also more traditional roles to fulfil, including keeping the organs of state accountable. As far older nations continue to demonstrate, democracy itself is no protection from the abuse of power.

Quality journalism, however, no longer refers merely to the usual features of fine writing or evocative soundbites. It implies participation in the drive to build a better, fairer, more tolerant and happier society. This requires empathy, understanding and the capacity to inspire. It requires a media that is diverse, telling the stories of people who in a million different ways are contributing to the construction of a new country.

The new generation of journalists in South Africa faces a very different world to the one encountered by their forbears. It is a world of converging technologies and transglobal forces. It is a world in which journalists will be required to understand complex developments and convey their meaning using a variety of platforms in the shortest period of time. This could hardly be more different from the days when a reporter had to get on a horse and gallop to the nearest town to dispatch a story by telegram.

But today's journalists also have much in common with those purveyors of excellence who have gone before them. To produce work of outstanding quality, they will still need courage, learning, talent and compassion. They will still be committed to rooting out the truth. They will still be determined to expose the corrupt and to give a voice to the voiceless. These things will never change.

This book is something of a departure for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The Social Cohesion and Identity Research Programme (SCI), from where this book emanates, is one of the HSRC's newest units. Like the other research programmes, it is focused on those areas of national priority

that will most contribute to the building of a more equitable, prosperous society. Increasingly, the notion of social cohesion is being understood to be a key driver of equity, development and identity. The SCI includes in its mandate the understanding and research of those elements that hold communities and nations together. Like religion, sport and the arts, the media create what Benedict Anderson once called imagined communities. It is in these communities that we spend our leisure time, build friendships and define our needs, our wants and indeed ourselves.

In keeping with the HSRC's own drive to embrace excellence in its staff component, in its research methodologies and in the usefulness of its outputs, this book celebrates excellence. It gathers together an extraordinary group of individuals who have collectively reached the pinnacle of their profession. Many of the contributors are household names who daily interact with ordinary South Africans in print, on radio or on television. From the cartoons you have chuckled over and the news you've been waiting for to the sports articles you've consumed with your Sunday breakfast, the contributors will inevitably have touched your life at some point. All of them have made important contributions to excellence in the South African media. Indeed, there can be no better group to inspire, teach and guide the next generation of South African journalists. In their words will be found a wealth of advice, experience and an array of ethical, technical and procedural guidelines that will help to define best practice in the years to come.

This book is unique in South Africa. It will undoubtedly have an impact on young minds and perhaps on a few old ones too. In its agenda to promote excellence in the South African media and thereby deepen our young democracy, it is both as welcome as it is needed. But this is also as far from a textbook as one could imagine. The wordcraft, sprinkling of anecdotes and fascinating experiences of this group of writers – so evident in their chapters – encapsulate the one quality that all excellent print journalism has in common: it's simply a good read.

Jakes Gerwel
Chairperson of the HSRC
Director of Naspers Media24
Member of the International Advisory Board of Independent Newspapers
Johannesburg, July 2004

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INTRODUCTION Adrian Hadland

The story begins in a bar – as do so many legendary tales of journalistic endeavour, real and imagined. It was the winter of 1902 and war correspondent Edgar Wallace was chatting to financier Harry Cohen in the bar of Johannesburg's Heath Hotel. Wallace, who emigrated to South Africa when he was 21, was working for the *Daily Mail* of London and was worrying aloud about the difficulties of reporting on the Boer War peace talks that appeared to be winding to a close at the nearby town of Vereeniging (Crwys-Williams 1989: 193–203).

All the correspondents had been excluded from the talks, mainly at the insistence of Lord Kitchener, who disliked journalists and whose censors vetted all despatches. Cohen and Wallace struck up a friendship at the bar over their liquor of choice and, perhaps rashly, Cohen offered to be the link between Wallace and his Fleet Street editors. They devised a simple plan. Wallace would encode the story in stock-market jargon and hand it to Cohen. Harry would cable it to his brother, Caesar, in London. Caesar would then relay it to the newsroom of the *Daily Mail* for decoding. The higher the price of the share and the more ordered, the closer the negotiators were to signing the peace treaty. On the first trial run, in which Wallace asked Caesar to purchase 1000 Rand Collieries shares, the censors immediately challenged Wallace to explain the cable. Wallace, however, was able to produce a broker's note that showed he had indeed purchased 1000 Rand Collieries shares. From then on, the cables went unnoticed.

As the peace talks continued, Wallace travelled each day by train from Pretoria to Vereeniging to keep an eye on progress. The train track carried him past the barbed-wire fencing and heavy security of the peace talks compound. Wallace had a mole at the talks, a guard at the entrance of the marquee in which the talks were taking place. Explaining that he wanted to stretch his legs, the guard took out a handkerchief and blew his nose as the train carrying Wallace went by each day. A red handkerchief signalled 'nothing happening', a blue one said 'making progress' and a white one indicated 'treaty to be signed'.

On the evening of 3 May 1902, after two days of fierce debating, the Boer and British negotiators finally agreed to the terms for peace. As Wallace's train passed by, his informant vigorously blew his nose with a white handkerchief.

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The time had come, the treaty was imminent. On receiving Wallace's famous telegram, which read 'Have bought you 1,000 Rand Collieries 40s 6d.' – the code that the treaty was signed – the *Daily Mail* locked every door to its building. The entire staff, from teaboy to editor, was forced to spend the night in the office to ensure the news wasn't leaked. Twenty-four hours before the British House of Commons was officially informed that the Treaty of Vereeniging had been concluded, the *Daily Mail* broke the story. The same year, Wallace was appointed founding editor of a new newspaper in South Africa – *The Rand Daily Mail.*

Looking back over close to 200 years of South African journalism, one would be hard-pressed to choose its finest moment. There are many, many contenders in a history riddled with excellence. Perhaps one would choose Wallace's scoop. But one might just as easily also choose the contribution of Thomas Pringle and John Fairbairn, the editors of the country's second newspaper, *The South African Commercial Advertiser.* Fairbairn and Pringle were the first to take up the fight for press freedom in South Africa and soon suffered the bannings, censorship and harassment such a fight has repeatedly attracted. After enduring the seizure of their presses and the closing down of both the *Advertiser* and the *South African Journal*, which Pringle also edited, the two pioneering editors petitioned the British Crown to grant the right of establishing a free press in the colony. The petition was duly awarded in July 1828 (Crwys-Williams 1989: 16).

Another choice for South African journalism's finest moment might be the extraordinary reportage of Sol Plaatje, whose eyewitness account of the Boer War's infamous siege of Mafeking was first published only in 1972. Discovered almost by accident, Plaatje's *Mafeking Diary* was written when he was just 23 years old. It has been hailed as a document of 'enduring importance and fascination' (Comaroff 1989: 1). It depicted, for the first time in relation to the siege, the black population's role, a perspective all too often overlooked in the narratives and reportage of the colonial and apartheid eras.

But while Wallace, Plaatje, Rudyard Kipling and even Winston Churchill graced South African journalism in the early years of the 20th century, it was a very different breed that won honour for their profession in the 1950s. It was the turn of a homebrew blend of young, urbanised, black, talented journalists who came to be called the *Drum* generation after the magazine for which most of them worked. Their names are inscribed forever in the lexicon of great South African writers who used their art to describe, change, challenge and evoke their

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colourful, complex lives. Can Themba, Henry Nxumalo, Es'kia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Richard Rive, Casey Motsisi, Bloke Modisane and Arthur Mogale all added a new and wonderful chapter to South African journalistic excellence. In their work for *Drum* magazine, they proved once and for all that superb writing could never be confined by an arbitrary notion such as race.

Two pieces of writing from this generation deserve special mention. Can Themba's *Requiem for Sophiatown* is one. It captures so beautifully the cadences and sadness of life in the aftermath of the destruction of the suburb of Sophiatown. Here Themba recalls the racially mixed surburb's famous Thirty-Nine Steps shebeen (drinking spot) and its equally famous and well-proportioned proprietor: 'Fatty of the Thirty-Nine Steps, now that was a great shebeen! It was in Good Street. You walked right up a flight of steps, the structure looked dingy as if it would crash down with you any moment. You opened a door and walked into a dazzle of bright, electric light, contemporary furniture, and massive Fatty. She was a legend. Gay, friendly, coquettish, always ready to sell you a drink. And that mama had everything: whisky, brandy, gin, beer, wine – the lot. Sometimes she could even supply cigars. But now that house is flattened. I'm told that in Meadowlands she has lost the zest for the game. She has even tried to look for work in town. Ghastly' (in Crwys-Williams 1989: 320).

But it could just as easily be argued that Henry Nxumalo, or 'Mr Drum', as he became known, was perhaps the most famous of all of South Africa's journalists. In 1954, Mr Drum wrote an astonishing series of articles on the plight of farm labourers in the Bethal area. But it was his great jail scoop that arguably marked the apogee of his work. Getting himself arrested deliberately on a trivial pass-book offence, Nxumalo published a devastating report on conditions at Johannesburg's infamous 'Number Four' prison.

His *Drum* article started like this: 'I served five days' imprisonment at the Johannesburg Central Prison from January 20 to January 24. My crime was being found without a night pass five minutes before midnight, and I was charged under the curfew regulations. I was sentenced to a fine of 10s or five days' imprisonment… We returned to jail at 4(pm). We were ordered to undress and *tausa*, a common routine of undressing prisoners when they return from work, searching their clothes, their mouths, armpits and rectum for hidden articles. I didn't know how it was done. I opened my mouth, turned round and didn't jump and clap my hands. The white warder conducting the search hit me with his fist on my left jaw, threw my clothes at me and went on searching the others. I ran off, and joined the food queue' (in Crwys-Williams 1989: 312).

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Nxumalo's piece was all the more powerful because it was accompanied by some extraordinary pictures of the *tausa* taken by photographer Bob Gosani. After scouting around the prison for a possible vantage point, Gosani found he could look into the prison exercise yard from the roof of a nearby nurses' college. In the massive fallout from the story, the humiliating dance was stopped, warders were demoted and conditions improved, if only slightly (Crwys-Williams 1989: 318).

Moving into the 1970s, could anyone really oppose the inclusion of either Percy Qoboza or Donald Woods as two of South Africa's finest journalism practitioners? Qoboza built *The World* into a major social and political voice that daily spoke out against apartheid and articulated the experiences of ordinary people during the 1970s. Detained without charge, Qoboza was repeatedly intimidated and harassed for his ardent political views. Undeterred, he became a legend for his crusading style of journalism, his editorial and his famous column, 'Percy's Pitch'. *The World* was eventually shut down by the government in 1977, as part of the blanket crackdown on the black consciousness movement. But Qoboza continued to play his part at titles such as the *Sunday Post* and *City Press*. 'It is true that for evil to succeed,' Qoboza once wrote, 'it takes far too many good people to keep quiet and stand by.'

Woods's special bond with the charismatic black consciousness leader Steve Biko and his unrelenting opposition to the apartheid government in the pages of the newspaper he edited, the *Daily Dispatch*, marked him as one of the great icons of South African journalistic accomplishment. Perhaps his best-known and most controversial work was the editorial he wrote on 16 October 1972.

Penned in a hurry as a response to a question posed by the then Minister of Defence, PW Botha, Woods wrote as follows: 'The Cape leader of the Nationalist Party, Mr PW Botha, asks who will rejoice if the Nationalist Government is toppled. Dar-es-Salaam will rejoice, he says. Lusaka and Peking and Moscow will rejoice, he says. He asks who else will rejoice. Here is an answer for him: Cape Town will rejoice, Johannesburg will rejoice. Durban will rejoice. Port Elizabeth, East London and Maritzburg will rejoice. Germiston, Springs and Benoni will rejoice. Every single South African city of any size – apart from Pretoria and Bloemfontein – will rejoice… And outside the country, too. Nairobi will rejoice, Cairo will rejoice, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Bagdad will rejoice… Can Mr PW Botha be serious when he asks who will rejoice when the Nationalist Government is toppled from power? Surely he knows the answer: "The whole bloody world will rejoice"' (in Crwys-Williams 1989: 407–8).

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Woods was banned shortly thereafter by the South African government and fled the country for exile.

But it wasn't long before excellence emerged once more from South African journalism's pool of talent. 'Infogate' or 'Muldergate' was unquestionably one of the country's great political scoops. It caused the fall both of the president, Mr BJ Vorster, and of his heir apparent, Dr Connie Mulder. The story of how a group of investigative reporters unravelled the complex plot involving secret military slush funds, cabinet ministers and an extraordinary and costly propagandistic drive to improve apartheid South Africa's global image ranks right up there in South African journalism's hall of fame. Though many contributed, the names of Mervyn Rees, Kitt Katzin and Chris Day remain foremost as the reporters who broke Muldergate.

Here is how Rees and Day introduced their work on Muldergate in their book of the same title: 'It was nearly midnight at Miami International Airport. The lean figure in the St Moritz sweater stood up from a table near the Braniff Airline counter. Mervyn Rees stretched out his hand and said: "Dr Rhoodie, I presume?" And so ended a search that had lasted months. A search which had turned investigative journalist Rees and his colleague Chris Day into international transit-lounge lizards – just like the man they had chased across four continents. "So this is what you look like," said the hunted to the hunters. Rhoodie, architect of one of the most bizarre propaganda wars yet conceived, had slipped into the United States on a South African passport which had been withdrawn by his government – a government which he had tried to sell to a hostile world at any cost for most of his life… a government which now both hated and feared him, and which had transformed him from one of the most powerful men in Africa into a stateless fugitive…' (Rees & Day 1980: 1).

The Muldergate scandal once more reaffirmed the role of the Fourth Estate in exposing the excesses of those in power. In this instance, however, it did more than merely topple a president. It gave many the first real sign that the nationalist government was vulnerable and that opportunities existed to pursue a different path. Says Allister Sparks, who was the editor of *The Rand Daily Mail* at the time: 'Muldergate has shattered the image of leadership in the eyes of the traditionally patriarchal Nationalist volk. The fall of the father figure John Vorster and his heir apparent… [has] all added up to a national trauma. What will emerge from that trauma is still uncertain, but there are already signs that the old monolithic unity has been shaken up. There are new tensions and cracks appearing. A new leadership has taken over and is moving in a more reformist

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direction. But… perhaps the most significant thing of all is to be seen at a simpler level. It is just this: Surely, in a country where the press and the judiciary can still beat the odds to expose a massive government scandal and bring down the most powerful political figures, there must still be hope for the forces of peaceful change' (in Rees & Day 1980: xiv).

By the 1980s, it was the turn of the men and women of the alternative press to make their bid for journalistic excellence. In the face of overwhelming state hostility – more than 100 statutes limited the activities of the media – the mainstream press handed the baton of its Fourth Estate responsibilities to the under-resourced but determined newspapers and magazines of the alternative press. Free from the constraints of commercial self-interest and shrugging off great personal risk, there were many who sought to publish the truth about what was happening in apartheid South Africa at the time. Their names include Moegsien Williams (former co-editor of *South* and head of the editors' panel for this book), Irwin Manoim, the co-founding editor of *The Weekly Mail* (who has written a chapter for this book), Max du Preez who edited the *Vrye Weekblad*, and the various staffers and editors of publications like *New Nation*, *Grassroots* and *South*. All these publications made emphatic contributions to the independence, outspokenness and quality of the South African media. *The Weekly Mail's* exposé of South Africa's undercover military dirty-tricks operations, known as the 'Third Force', and its role in the abduction and killing of anti-apartheid activists, must also claim a place in South African journalism's hall of fame.

Of course there have been many more examples of excellence in the South African media in the years just before the end of apartheid and in the more than ten years of democracy since 1994. Among these were the powerful and ubiquitous coverage of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the bravery and, in some cases, ultimate sacrifice, of the photographers who captured the images of apartheid's death throes. The difficulty of choosing just a few for the purposes of this introduction is testimony to the generations of wonderful writers, columnists, photographers, designers and editors who have graced the newsrooms and hallways of South African media establishments. I have emphasised the contribution of the print sector deliberately as, until the liberalisation of the broadcasting environment in the early 1990s, both radio and television were entirely state controlled. Since then, people of quality have certainly emerged in the sector.

While there has been so much of which to be proud in South African

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journalism over the years and while there is so much talent in evidence, all too seldom are the practitioners of such quality forced to sit down to write about their experiences and their art. Occasionally a former editor will write an autobiography or, like Gerald Shaw, publish the history of a title like the *Cape Times*. The danger is that the lessons of a lifetime run the risk of being lost and the institutional memory of the media allowed to forget the sacrifices and achievements of those who have gone before.

Just over ten years after South Africa became a democracy, the media are still struggling to understand and fulfil their role in the new dispensation. The state is no longer simply the enemy. Now the media are required to be more nuanced in their responses. They must be watchdog and corruption-buster, but they must also nurture goodwill and support national unity. They must be critical but they must also be constructive. They must reflect mainstream opinion but also work especially hard at giving voice to the voiceless. They must uphold ethical and professional standards while creating a more diverse workforce. These at times conflicting demands have inevitably lead to tensions, frustration and an environment in which excellence has found it hard to be heard.

But South African journalism has far more than its own unique context with which to deal. Globally, change of various kinds is forcing media institutions to re-examine working practices, staff skills and profiles, audiences and equipment. Commercialism is constantly threatening the bounds of editorial independence. Rapidly advancing technologies and, in particular, their convergence, are challenging media institutions to relook at training, infrastructure and investment. The concentration of ownership, the dumbing-down of content and the parochialisation of news agendas have all been consequences of the trend known as globalisation.

All this amounts to a tough, new world for young journalists entering the sector and hoping to make their mark. It is a world of difficult choices, moral dilemmas and sophisticated technical demands. This book, in which South Africa's top journalists and journalism practitioners have been asked to write personal essays about what they do best, is intended to help these newcomers along. Conceived as a contribution to building the long-term quality of South African media, *Changing the Fourth Estate: Essays on South African Journalism* is designed to provide young, new or aspirant journalists with inspirational role models, practical advice and best-practice guidelines from those best able to provide them. The main purpose is to enhance the quality of South African journalism with all the spin-offs such a development would have, from higher

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ethical standards and greater diversity to the deepening of democracy. I believe this book will serve as an important lodestone of excellence for a new generation of South African journalists.

The pursuit of excellence is one of the key objectives of the media research conducted within the Social Cohesion and Identity Research Programme of the HSRC. Our belief is that quality media are better equipped to understand, analyse and convey our complex society. Quality media are also more likely to contribute to the deepening of South Africa's fledgling democracy by being a vehicle for the trust, empathy and sense of community that must underpin the new South Africa. It is hoped that the next generation of journalists will learn from their illustrious forbears the tricks, techniques and principles that underpin work of real quality.

In an industry famous for competitive rivalry, choosing the best journalists was far from an easy task. Fortunately, a panel of editors consisting of Moegsien Williams, the editor of *The Star*, Pippa Green, head of news at SABC radio, and *Rapport* editor Tim du Plessis agreed to pool their extraordinary experience and thorough knowledge of the South African media to assist in choosing the writers for this book. The result is an outstanding collection of contributors from the very highest echelons of the sector representing a diverse array of specialties, interests and backgrounds. There are many more categories of journalism not included in this book. My wish is that in the next volume we will be able to include chapters on topics such as news photography, subediting and arts reviewing.

In the meantime, what this first volume does present is a wonderful start to capturing the talent, knowledge and advice of some of South Africa's best journalists and journalism experts. In the first chapter of this book, media teacher Guy Berger bemoans the fact that a totally new and South African paradigm of journalism has yet to emerge in the post-1994 era. As a consequence, he argues, the media is probably making much less of an impact on our transitional society than it could or should. In seeking to help correct this and provide journalists with the basic tools to better themselves and their profession, Berger provides some extremely useful tips for the construction of this new, ethical paradigm.

News writing is the coalface of journalism, according to Tony Weaver. In the second chapter, Weaver introduces us to a variety of styles and a range of tools with which to craft a sharp, effective, truthful news story. Get it wrong, and the consequences can be far-reaching, Weaver says. Get it right, and the consequences can be equally far-reaching.

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In Chapter Three, we get down to the nitty-gritty of professional journalism with an essay by the renowned investigative journalist Mzilikazi wa Afrika. Mzilikazi, who has worked for several media organisations, including the *Sunday Times*, shows great passion and commitment to getting to the truth. He demonstrates his art with some hair-raising stories, together with a few of the articles that emanated from his award-winning investigations. If you think investigative journalism is as easy as it is glamorous, read on.

Political writer Angela Quintal shares her experiences as a political journalist in Chapter Four. Political reporting, she says, is not about rewriting mundane statements e-mailed or faxed to an office. It includes many things, like good contacts, flexibility, professionalism, being available at all hours, teamwork, the competitive edge and, most importantly, enjoying one's job.

In Chapter Five, Peta Thornycroft introduces us to her life and work as a correspondent covering conflict-torn Zimbabwe. The country is not your traditional war zone, but the constraints, the fear and the heartache that come with reporting on your own country as it spirals ever deeper into tragedy make for a compelling read.

Chapter Six presents a master class in the art of feature writing from respected journalism teacher Franz Krüger. Whether it's the champagne glass, the diamond, the hub-and-spokes or the sketch-and-miniature style of feature writing, Krüger gives the aspirant feature writer a range of options. At root, though, is the necessity for thorough research and the importance of having a clear plan.

Travel writing is widely considered to be one of the more glamorous and interesting careers within journalism. But what is a travel writer? In Chapter Seven, Carol Lazar suggests that, above all, a good travel writer is somebody who writes like a dream. Then, if you combine a news reporter, a political analyst, a passionate storyteller, a humorist and an observant feature writer and mix them together then, possibly, you'll come up with a great travel writer. Read Lazar's chapter for some great tips on how to excel at travel writing.

In Chapter Eight, Rodney Hartman introduces us to what he calls the 'impact zone'. It is the world of sports writing, and fewer parts of the newspaper are subjected to as close scrutiny as reports about one's favourite team or sportsperson. Glamorous as it may be to sit in the stands penning reports of the big game, the readership is as voracious as it is discriminating. Learn the tricks of the trade from one of the best.

John Perlman has a huge following in South Africa for his morning radio show on AM Live. His interviews are invariably penetrating, revealing and

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informative. In Chapter Nine, he reveals how to pose a question that 'well and truly hits the mark'.

Freelance journalism potentially provides an exciting career opportunity for many current and prospective journalists. In Chapter Ten, one of the country's most successful freelance writers, Marianne Thamm gives an essential list of the dos and don'ts of freelance journalism. Among the myths that Thamm debunks: freelancing is about slowing down, can be done in an isolated retreat and isn't a real job. There is also a commonly held belief, she writes, that researching, writing and marketing your work will somehow miraculously slot in comfortably between growing herbs, changing nappies or tinkering with the Harley. If this is what you think about freelancing, you couldn't be more wrong, as you will find out in her excellent, experience-laden chapter.

One of the most important jobs in any branch of journalism is that of news editor. It is a thankless, hard but crucial function that largely determines the news agenda and its presentation in any form of media. John MacLennan is widely regarded as one of the best news editors of his generation. In Chapter Eleven, he explains the job and provides a few tips and pointers for the future. What are the news editor's key attributes? Curiosity, determination and the capacity for lateral thought, according to MacLennan.

In Chapter Twelve, one of the country's highest regarded media lawyers shares the benefits of years of experience in his essay on journalism and the law. Focusing on two important court cases involving journalists and the organisation known as People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad), Jacques Louw sets out the principles and guidelines necessary to stay out of legal hot water.

In Chapter Thirteen, George Claassen explains why ethics are so important to the craft of journalism. He argues that credibility is a vital prerequisite for the attainment of journalistic excellence and traces some of the essential principles of ethical practice.

Well-known South African cartoonist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) shares his insights and techniques in public for the first time in Chapter Fourteen of this book. He differentiates between sitcom cartoons and conceptual editorial cartoons, offers some advice to aspirant cartoonists and illustrates his work, as he would, with some classic examples of Zapiro at his famous, witty, biting best.

Chapter Fifteen tackles the vital job of designing the pages of the newspapers and magazines that carry the news. It is written, says author David Hazelhurst, to give insights to those who want to practise design and to encourage those tasked with the layout of important stories to think differently

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and more creatively. Four case studies are presented to illustrate the immense power that can be generated by planning stories collectively and holistically.

In Chapter Sixteen, Dennis Pather offers a reflection on his own experiences in the editor's chair. His essay aims at providing some idea to the young and/or aspirant journalist of what it is like to be the editor of a daily newspaper: the challenges, decisions, choices, quandaries and issues an editor must face – and resolve – on a daily basis.

Joe Thloloe tackles the art of television news in Chapter Seventeen. In his step-by-step guide, Thloloe urges the coverage and filming of stories that have meaning for the viewer, that will affect him or her and that will, most importantly, evoke viewers' emotions. When done correctly, a quality television report can amount to 'a seamless welding of pictures, sounds, words that can be as effective as poetry'.

In Chapter Eighteen, Pippa Green argues that the most important lesson for aspirant radio journalists is that radio news hinges on credibility. To sustain that, she says, one needs accuracy. This is often easier said than done in an age, and medium, where swiftness is everything, where the competitive pressures are great and where, in the case of the public broadcaster, the terrain of news is politically so hotly contested. But this is precisely, she argues, why it is crucial to maintain high editorial standards, including editorial independence.

Ruth Teer-Tomaselli introduces the reader in Chapter Nineteen to the debates and principles surrounding the notion of public broadcasting. Is there a place for it? What are its demands and from where do its strongest challenges emanate? Teer-Tomaselli provides a vital context for considering the questions that underpin the theory of broadcasting, the framing of policy and the informed selection of different career paths.

In Chapter Twenty, Arrie Rossouw asks: Is there a role for newspapers, and journalists and news photographers in the digital future? In answering the question, Roussouw points out that newspaper publishing is no longer about printing ink in 24-hour cycles on chopped-down trees. It is, he says, about distributing content in all platforms – print, online, television, radio, cellphone and so on. Journalists need to be able to adapt to this philosophy as well as to the new demands and working conditions of the digital newsroom.

Transformation and diversity is not about numbers, according to Rehana Rossouw. In Chapter Twenty-one, she writes that it's the mindsets and structures of organisations that need to be changed. It is not about having the same proportion of women and blacks in the newsroom as there is in society. It will

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only be achieved when women and blacks – as a starting point for change – have the same voice and power in the organisation as whites and men. In South Africa, especially, where the race debate has hardly started to be addressed honestly and race taints everything, producing media that only reflect the editor's outlook on life is dangerous and wrong – even if the editor is a black female.

So what does the future hold? In the concluding chapter to this book, Irwin Manoim looks ahead to the technologies and devices that are likely to be the media platforms of the next generation. But will anything ever really replace good old paper?

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CHAPTER ONE

Current challenges

Guy Berger

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Under apartheid, much of our journalism was criticised for being Eurocentric – that is, for reflecting a world that had little to do with South African realities. A decade of democracy has seen major improvements, but a new and South African paradigm of journalism has still to emerge. This contrasts with other areas of media. Take television shows like *Yizo Yizo*, or adverts for beer and cellphones. They've adopted Western formats yet adapted them to our situation. But journalism lags behind – and it probably makes a lot less impact on our transitional society than it could.

Too much of our reporting is dull, dry and predictable – and of interest only to a bunch of middle-aged elites. Much else is trivial entertainment for dumbed-down masses, without any illuminating information. There are many – too many – mistakes and inaccuracies. Worst is the recent advent of imitating Fleet Street's tabloid-style fictionalising and sensationalism. That mix of clichéd sexuality and soccer scandal does not make for a valued model of South African journalism. Finally, the narrow, nationalistic focus in much media is an injustice to the richness of all who live in our society.

So, how can you as a journalist better tell our stories? It takes continuing, and smart, efforts , but then you can take inspiration from a famous South African who perservered even though, as he noted, there was 'no easy walk to freedom'. You can also take on board the acronyms spelt out below RAINS, POWER and HELP!, and have some tips to fall back upon on the long, hard journey to a new South African journalism.

RAINS

Start with 'R' for race. Through our history, skin colour has been a signal for all kinds of things – whether people were the oppressed or the oppressor, poor or rich, unschooled or educated. Race told us a lot about a person's culture, language options and place of residence. It has left us today with the apparent obviousness of being a white or black person or, for some, the distinction of being African, coloured or Indian.

Yet, against this legacy, our Constitution commits us to building a non-racial society – one where race is no longer destiny, and where our diversity refers to social, not biological, differences. For journalism, this entails resisting the ingrained instinct to take race as something fixed and for granted in terms of what it means. The point is that race may indeed be important in some stories (such as those about racism) and in regard to some audiences; it is irrelevant in many other cases. Dig beneath the surface and make the judgement call, don't make automatic assumptions. You can recognise that to properly explain most stories requires uncovering the complexities of people that cannot be reduced simply to the racial identity of the actors.

Non-racial journalism, however, doesn't mean being completely colour-blind. It means being sensitive to correcting the remaining historical imbalances wherein those people defined as black are neglected and/or negated in the media.

As a journalist, you have to deal continuously and consciously with the difficult issue of race as it has been, is now, and as it could be in the future. Looking ahead, the challenge is to begin to see beyond skin colour and to understand how class and culture are becoming the new passports to identity, privilege and newsworthiness. These will be detached from race, but they can risk being still as discriminatory as colour in their social impact. Be armed, therefore, with a sense that race may have relevance, but also that many other factors may be at work.

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'A' is for Africa, the continent of which we are part. The understanding must be not 'South Africa' and 'Africa', but 'South Africa' and 'the rest of Africa'. One integrated body, where pain in one part is felt in another. As we know, South Africa cannot be healthy if our neighbours are ailing. Conversely, success in one country results in echoes elsewhere on the continent. What's needed is for us South African journalists to see ourselves as African journalists. This means waking up to the many fellow Africans living here, and recognising their diversity by refusing to perpetuate stereotypes about Nigerians, Zimbabweans or other nationalities. You could profitably remember, too, that immigrants are not just subjects of stories; they are also part of our audience.

'Africa' also means giving South African audiences information on, and insight into, other countries on the continent, and not only stories that are negative. To have an African mindset implies understanding the commonalities across the sweep of the continent – and including South Africa – of similar colonial histories, peripheral economies, rural cultures, ancestral traditions... and also health challenges like HIV and malaria.

So, keep in mind the African-ness required of your journalism (but don't fall into the trap of thinking there can only be one way of being African). Otherwise, miss out on this vast historical tide that is delivering increasing social integration to the fragmented geographical map of the continent's countries. And make your audience miss the story as well.

'Income' is what you should remember from the 'I' of RAINS. Arguably, the biggest problem in South Africa is poverty. The only thing worse than having HIV is to have no income and have HIV. Our journalism thus needs to keep the question of class on the public agenda. The challenge is to cover the voices of the poor and the marginalised, many of whom are outside the ranks of media audiences. This requires extra efforts – the poor do not send out press releases or call conferences. We also have to avoid representing poor people as purely victims in need of charity, and instead reveal their legitimate rights to a decent lifestyle, plus their struggles to survive against severe odds. For journalism to put a dent into poverty, it is essential to pressure powerful people into a permanent state of debate about policies and practices, and about how government, business and middle-class people can make more of a difference to their deprived compatriots.

'N' is for 'nation'. Nation-building is not something that the media alone can manufacture, but there is still a part that journalists can play. Each and

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every story should be able to successfully answer the question: 'Why will this information be of any interest to anyone outside of this community?' How can you get readers in Sandton to care about a kwaito group comprised of shack-dwellers in Soweto-by-the-Sea? What will make TV viewers in big cities interested in the effects of drought in the Northern Cape? Can we convey to listeners of Tsonga radio news that the Afrikaans Klein Karoo Arts Festival is fun and full of cultural inspiration? Take this nation-building challenge to heart, and help us begin to talk in a real sense about 'the South African people'.

'S' stands for 'sex' – or, perhaps more correctly, gender. Only when our journalism proactively presents women in better proportion to their population percentages will we be able to say that we have made a proper break with the past. But there is still a long way to go – in terms of both the quantity and quality dimensions of coverage of women in the news. Female sources of news have to be consciously sought out, and stories have to be scrutinised to see if they are not being written with the self-fulfilling assumption that the audience comprises mainly men. We have to speak to (and for) both sexes, and we have to ensure that the second-class status of women is not something our journalism legitimises. Our task then is to mount a challenge against sexist attitudes and behaviour – not by propagandising or proselytising (these aren't the jobs of journalism), but by professional gender-sensitive reporting.

Take all this to heart, and let the 'RAINS' fall on your journalism. We'll then see some South African sprouts peeping through the parched soil of the media! Coverage that is cognisant of Race, Africa, Income, Nation and Sex will help grow a proud model of South African human-rights-based journalism.

POWER

You have the power as a journalist to put into practice a range of roles in relation to the RAINS. Here's a sample. You can Play an Orientation role, a Watchdog role, an Empowering role and a Representative role (POWER). Too many media people become stuck in a single rut, and sing just a single tune. The beauty of being a journalist, however, is that you can make diverse kinds of music. At times, you are an able guardian of people's rights by being a watchdog in exposing abuses. At other times, you can be a cheerleader championing role models who will empower your audience. And there are more possibilities as well. Here they are in more detail.

'Play'. Much like it is in a drama, a role is an identity you take up and work within. It is a script you follow to achieve a set purpose. So it is in

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journalism. Some roles may come more naturally to your personality and skill. You may ache to be a celebrity interviewer or investigative crusader in front of the camera; you may prefer the behind-the-scenes editing or research. But remember that an actor is able to play a variety of parts, and similarly a journalist should strive to be as broadly multiskilled as possible. A professional actor also recognises the importance of entertaining an audience. Journalism also allows you to make emotional impact – both pleasurable and painful. You can be playful at times; on other occasions you may move an audience to tears. Don't forget these dynamics of Play.

'Orientation' is about giving helpful information to your audience. It is about being a guide in a complicated world, enabling people to position themselves and to understand what is going on around them. It is about providing context and educational information – not just the 'what', but also the 'how' and 'why' of your stories. It is about serving the needs of people to network themselves in a world that is cruel one moment and compassionate the next.

'Watchdog' is a role that focuses on accountability. It puts ill-doers in the public limelight for actions they would prefer to keep in the dark. This role may expose men molesting children or bureaucrats stealing from the people. It can put the spotlight on a politician dodging responsibility to act on a pressing problem, and it can name-and-shame a company polluting the environment. In all this, watchdog journalism represents the public interest and it upholds human rights. The only caveat is that this role should beware of narrowing into guard-dog journalism – i.e. working on behalf of special interests instead of the general interest. Playing the watchdog role needs to be even-handed. Government is indeed a fair target, but so too are business, civil society and even private individuals involved in abuses.

The necessary sceptical attitude that goes along with 'Watchdog-ism' does not mean that journalists should become cynical. The sceptic asks critical questions, whereas the cynic already knows the answers – and that these are the worst. Scepticism is not cynicism. Nor is it incompatible with the next role – one that gives hope.

This third role, to 'Empower', helps us remember that journalism exists not only to discredit the abusers, but also to celebrate the heroes and heroines. An 'Empowering' role can highlight acts of courage and nobility in cases of disaster and tragedy. It can find the flaws in Afro-pessimism. It can give individuals the confidence to believe in themselves and their fellows, as well as provide solutions-oriented information that will give practical effect to people's empowerment.

Then comes the distinctive 'Representative' role. It is different to playing a

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'Watchdog' role, which entails a partisan position – taking sides on behalf of the public. Instead, this is the role of reflecting, fairly and impartially, a range of different viewpoints. It does not mean that a journalist turns into a silent platform, to be walked upon by would-be newsmakers irrespective of whether they are honest or are spouting untruths. It means, instead, that the journalist is an active referee, enforcing rules of debate and reprimanding or countermanding players where appropriate.

Playing the professional roles of Orientator, Watchdog, Empowerer and Representative is a complex challenge. Some roles are more suited to some stories, sometimes a mix is called for. A good journalist should be versatile enough to deploy them as appropriate. Covering an election, for example, may call equally for stories that are educational, and for stories showing voter intimidation or political deceit. There are important places, too, for stories of successes in peaceful electioneering and also for a range of different political views. Not every story is a Watchdog one, nor is there a need to always give every loudmouth instant access to the soapbox – although somewhere such views have a right to be heard. The point is that journalists need the POWER to provide audiences with the richness of all these roles, as befits the content.

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HELP

There's more that's needed if RAINS and POWER are to produce a paradigm shift in our media practice. Underlying all journalism is a set of values. The craft is not an objective science with clear-cut rules for every conundrum. There are difficult choices to be made all along the way.

What story should I do, and what angle ought I take on it? Whom do I interview, and whom not? Do I tell them I am a journalist or keep quiet about this? What facts do I accept as gospel, and which do I verify? When can I use information from someone else's story? Should I accept information 'off the record'? What will the consequences be of my story on the people involved? Do you need assistance in deciding how to answer these and other ethical questions? Here's HELP! (as developed from ideas originally put forward by the Poynter Institute).

'H' is for your Heart. Listen carefully when there are pricks of conscience, half-formed questions and faint uncertainties. Beware the dulling of your emotions just because you may have done things a certain way many times before. The point is that your gut feel is an important barometer about what

is an ethical issue, and about how you should proceed with it. So, when your Heart says 'hesitate', pause your Head and Hands for a moment. And then follow the steps below.

'E' stands for 'Externalise'. You can't make a self-centred decision. Chances are, you're employed by a firm and there are policies and practices in place. Do they allow you to use anonymous sources? And, if so, under what conditions? Do you agree with a news editor who says it's fine to hype up a story for its sensational value – or will you contest this, perhaps even to the point of seeking a job elsewhere?

Besides your immediate context of employment, you also need to Externalise by asking what your peers in the profession would say in regard to your decision. Ask them. See, too, if there is an item in a journalistic code of conduct that speaks to the issue. Finally, consider the morality of your friends and family – can you defend your decision to them? (You may end up having to!)

'L' points to 'Looking more closely at the story'. How important is it? What will be the reaction of the source if you concentrate on some quotes rather than others? Check out what you take for granted as facts about your ethical conundrum. What amounts to speculation about consequences, and what is definitive cause-and-effect?

Our country deserves a new paradigm of journalism. Fortunately, it has the capacity to generate one.

'P' puts you in the position to examine 'Possibilities'. There are always several choices in making a decision. Think proactively about at least one alternative way of resolving the ethical issue at hand. Then refer to your Heart, your Externalising and your Look at the facts. Which alternative now looks preferable? And will your choice be because the result is better with that particular option, or because you put a premium on the ethics of 'the means' rather than 'the end'? Know what Possibility you will choose and why.

'!' signals that you have to act. Journalism works to deadlines. On the other hand, however, rather miss a deadline than regret what you have published. It is better to take the time to check your facts, or get a comment from a source who is adversely implicated, than to bring yourself and your medium into disrepute by cutting corners. If you get something wrong, get the correction out quickly. Remember: a new South African journalism has to be a paragon of ethical practice.

These three acronyms – RAINS, POWER and HELP! – are basic tools. The first deals with the national character of our country and its impact on

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journalism. The second is about the many role options open to journalists in responding to these challenges. The third comes down to specific choices and decisions to be made on the job.

The importance of these formulae is underlined by the challenges facing the media industry in South Africa. An audit of skills by the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) in 2002 showed a huge shortfall on the part of reporters. In turn, however, this deficiency was blamed on weaknesses in training institutions, the skills lacunae among matriculants, and inadequate leadership by newsroom managers. Money-mad owners were also identified as a source of the problems because of their insistence on small staffs and insufficient salary budgets. Each of these stakeholders is central to breaking the impasse. But no one needs to wait for the other to act, and reporters themselves can do a lot to remedy the skills situation.

To be a journalist in South Africa is to enjoy one of the most exciting jobs on the planet, and to enjoy constitutional protection into the bargain. However, it also means taking on board a weighty professional responsibility, and taking seriously that the currency of the job is the credibility that comes from serving the public interest.

It follows that journalists should understand that to be a good producer of public meanings requires being an informed and critical consumer of the media. It means ongoing self-scrutiny and efforts to improve oneself and the industry.

It is hard work for a working journalist to keep an eye on all this. The pressures of production force a focus on the daily job. This is to the detriment of following up yesterday's story, and of researching tomorrow's coverage. Even more damaging is the effect on the big picture of the overall state of the craft. Good journalism needs the follow-up and to prepare for what's coming up, but great journalism takes on board a whole lot more as well. It comes to grips with the challenges of South Africa (RAINS), the various roles journalists can play (POWER), and the foundational ethics for making wise decisions (HELP!).

Our country deserves a new paradigm of journalism. Fortunately, it has the capacity to generate one. It will take time to reinvent the practice and for the profession to make more of a contribution to society. Remember, as you're out there, the POWER of RAINS to HELP!

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CHAPTER TWO

News writing

Tony Weaver

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Once upon a time, there must have been a time and a place where every news story written by a scribe for retelling began 'once upon a time'.

There, I just satisfied all the requirements of the traditional news story – who (the scribe), what (every news story), why (for retelling), when (once upon a time) and where (a place).

Today, depending on the medium, breaking news stories convey the urgency of their time and place in a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week world. Morning newspapers love the words 'late last night' or, even better, 'early this morning, as we went to press'. In television and radio, and on the Internet, it's 'and news just in', or 'two hours ago'. The cherry for television news networks is to say 'and now we cross live to…' and hopefully, for the sake of ratings, they will be able to show somebody dying live on camera. News has become entertainment. And there is a huge danger in this.

It is no accident that the first few years of this century have seen more journalistic scandals in a more concentrated space of time than any other time I can remember. American and British publications have endured withering

criticism as they have been found guilty of plagiarism, falsification and gullibility. In the most celebrated case, *The New York Times* publicly repudiated an entire body of work by one of its up-and-coming stars, Jayson Blair, after he admitted to being guilty of plagiarism. Then, in what I view as a far more serious act of institutional failure, *The Times* admitted that it had vastly exaggerated 'evidence' of Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, basing their stories on the flawed intelligence of one man, Ahmed Chalabi, a CIA frontman and self-aggrandising wannabe politician.

In the United Kingdom, the *Daily Mirror*, an anti-Iraq war tabloid, leapt into print with photographs that allegedly showed British troops torturing Iraqi prisoners of war. They turned out to be fake, and the editor resigned. Similarly, we have had the international media reporting a 'massacre' of civilians by Israeli troops in the Palestinian refugee camp of Jenin in April 2002. Whatever one's ideological bias or complexion, the facts were that 54 Palestinians, 47 of them members of militant groups that the Israelis describe as 'terrorists', were killed, hardly a massacre. It must be noted that 23 Israeli soldiers also died in the battles.

Whatever one believes about the war in Palestine, one has to base reporting on facts, not ideology. One of the culprits, in labelling what happened in Jenin as a massacre, was the *London Independent*, sister newspaper of the newspaper for which I write, the *Cape Times*. When the 'Indie's' reports started landing, we took the long view, and compared what they were saying with what the wire agencies like Reuters, Associated Press (AP) and Agence France Presse (AFP) were saying, and what our other major contributor of international news, the *Los Angeles Times* was saying. The reports didn't gel. The *London Independent* blasted their entire front page with news of 'the massacre of Jenin'. We opted to be cautious, and to balance our view with agency reportage. We were right, and called it the Battle for Jenin.

News writing is just that – writing the news. It is the coalface of journalism, the telling of a story that is fresh, new, the 'first rough draft of history', as the late Philip L Graham, then publisher of *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek* magazine, famously said in 1963. Journalists who write hard news carry an awesome responsibility. Get it wrong, and the consequences can be far-reaching. Get it right, and the consequences can be equally far-reaching.

As a result, 'Writing the news' is an almost impossible topic about which to write. I know that there is an entire library of academic literature out there analysing news reporting and journalism. Much of it is written by people who

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have never known the inside of a news story, let alone been close to the frontline.

Some time back, I was asked to deliver a guest lecture to journalism students. After the lecture, which dealt with my experiences as a war correspondent, I ran a seminar for postgraduate journalism students. To my horror, the students had been given large swodges of paper, copies of stories I had written over the years, many of them dashed off in a couple of minutes as deadline approached, some of them, quite frankly, written when I was pissed as a coot. Others had been dictated to a semi-literate copy typist from a handful of scrappy notes over a crackly phone line from some remote outpost in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya or Zambia.

The questions from the students were incredibly intimidating: Had I consciously invoked the technique of XYZ in writing this story? Had I followed the pyramid structures of the Poynter School of Journalism in writing that story? Had I inverted the pyramid to write about the suffering of peasant farmers? Had I, in fact, developed a sort of squashed rectangular pyramid in the way in which I book-ended another story? I had to reply that I had failed geometry in matric, that when I sit down at a keyboard I just write the story the way it plays in my mind, and that there are no academic models that I follow.

This may be heresy in an era in which a rigid structuralism seems to be creeping into the way in which journalism is taught, but it's what I'm good at – and what every hard news journalist should be good at: telling the story. Most importantly, telling the true story – not the story as we would like it to appear to seem because of our ideological point of view, but telling the truth. Because that's what we are, storytellers and truth tellers. We are the messengers of mediaeval times, the despatch runners of the 19th century, the town criers of the Middle Ages, the Pony Express riders of the American West, the harbingers of doom in a time of plague, the drummers who still, to this day, send the news reverberating through the hills and valleys of Central Africa. And that is often why the people who read us, who rely on us, also hate us. Because we bring more bad news than good. That is the nature of news. Good news is seldom news. Bad news is always news. It is in the telling of that news that greatness emerges.

During the darkest days of apartheid, when I was working on newspapers like *The Rand Daily Mail*, the *Cape Times* and, briefly, the *Sunday Times*, and later, when I was working as a foreign correspondent for the BBC's Africa Service, Irish Radio, Radio New Zealand and the Canadian Broadcasting

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Corporation's national television news, I would hold regular training courses for activist journalists on alternative newspapers like *South* and *Grassroots*. Then – as I still do now – I would tell the journalists (most of them activists who were pamphleteers rather than reporters) that there was no need to exaggerate, lie or propagandise. Apartheid and its atrocities were so vile that simply telling the truth in as bland and unemotional way as possible was quite enough. Tell a lie, and you would be prosecuted, because then the regime had a valid excuse to expose you as being part of what PW Botha called 'the total onslaught'. Besides which, the people reading your material were there; they could tell what was true and what wasn't. The truth is always more horrifying than fiction.

And one of the major problems in news today is that the pressure of the deadline, of the need to provide instant news, does not give the journalist in the field enough time to check all the facts, and sometimes the fiction becomes the truth. We see this constantly in the newsroom at the *Cape Times*. An 'urgent' snap will come in on the news wires from Iraq. Reuters will report that 'at least four people are believed to have died in a car-bomb explosion in Baghdad'. AFP, the least cautious of the agencies, will report that 'at least 25 people have died in a car-bomb explosion in Baghdad'.

Good news is seldom news. Bad news is always news. It is in the telling of that news that greatness emerges.

As the day goes on, so the story firms up: the final death toll will be six, with 25 wounded. Reuters will have raised their numbers, AFP will have downgraded because they had counted the wounded as dead in their initial reports. Meanwhile, early editions of newspapers, television and radio broadcasts would have gone out with the AFP version because more dead is sexier. And networks like CNN do the same thing: they run with instant news that has had no proper fact-checking conducted.

That is the basic truth of news reporting: if you are unsure of the facts, don't run the story, or else make sure you qualify it to hell and gone. Every fact, every allegation has to be checked, double-checked and checked again. Triple-source stories may sound like a lot of work, but then being on trial for defamation is also a lot of work. And it doesn't do your professional reputation a lot of good. (I had the reverse experience – in the 1980s, I was put on trial for allegedly lying about the police's execution of the Guguletu Seven. The court found that I had told the truth and the police had lied. It did my professional reputation an immense amount of good, but only because I and the other reporter involved had more than triple-sourced our stories.)

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That's the philosophical stuff, the ethics out the way. Let's get down to the practical basics of hard news reporting.

The defining moment in any news story is the intro, the introduction, the very first paragraph, what American journalism schools call the 'lead'. That is where readers are won or lost. As an occasional news editor, I tear my hair out when I ask reporters who have already written 300 or 400 words of a story, 'What's the intro?' and they reply, 'I don't know, I haven't got there yet.'

It is an aphorism of news writing – and this should be the mantra of every hard news journalist – that 'write the intro, and the story writes itself'. And yet, time and time again, I see journalists battling to conform to some vague academic notion of what constitutes a news story, and not getting to grips with the story itself – they don't know what the intro's going to be. Get a bunch of veteran hard news journalists around a table and ask them about their favourite intros. They will all have a story to tell, because an intro defines the story.

My all-time favourite intro (that I wrote) was: 'NOENIPUT, Northern Cape: It rained here yesterday.' That story made it onto the front pages of the *Cape Times*, *The Rand Daily Mail*, the *Daily Dispatch*, the *Natal Mercury* and the *Eastern Province Herald*. Those four words, 'it rained here yesterday', had a resonance for South Africa that went way beyond the ordinary. South Africa had been in the grip of a terrible drought, when an extraordinary series of weather fronts moved through, sparking off floods throughout the country. I happened to be driving through the Kalahari and arrived in the outpost of Noeniput, population 27, as the first drops of rain began to fall. It was the first rain the village had had in seven years. Sixteen of the inhabitants were younger than seven years of age, so my second paragraph read 'For half the population, it was the first rain they had ever seen'.

If I had written a conventional intro, like 'It rained in the Northern Cape village of Noeniput yesterday, breaking a drought that has lasted for seven years', the story would have been spiked.

It is another aphorism of news journalism, like both the English language and Latin, that 'rules are there to be broken'. Conventional journalistic wisdom has it that the intro can never be a quote. Nonsense. Try this exercise: 'Convicted mass murderer, John Doe, says, as the judge sends him to gaol for ten life terms, that "this was the most fun I ever had in my life".'

So, what's the best intro?

'Convicted mass murderer, John Doe, sentenced yesterday to 10 life terms in gaol, said as sentence was pronounced that "this was the most fun I ever had in my life"'? Or: 'This was the most fun I ever had in my life.'

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I prefer the second, tabloidish as it is. That's because I never see news reporting as a job. I see it as the most fun I ever had in my life, a constant opportunity to not only meet interesting people and portray their lives in print, but also to play with the English language in a never-ending attempt to engage readers and get them to read what I have written.

There really are no real rules in hard news reporting. But, as the exception to the rule, there are a few to which it is worth paying lip service. Fresh out of university, I joined *The Rand Daily Mail's* cadet school. Our tutor was an old hack by the name of Harland Bohler. On our first day in class, Harland said to us, 'Go get a cup of coffee, and spend the next hour reading *The Rand Daily Mail*. That's what you should have done before you arrived here, and that's what you need to do every day of your life as a journalist.' I still spend the first hour of my day drinking coffee and reading whatever morning newspaper there is at hand – an essential for any hard news journalist.

The other memorable thing Bohler taught us was that he gave us each a copy of a James Hadley Chase paperback and challenged us to come up with what we saw as the most important feature of the book. Being a politically correct class (this was 1981), we all came back with various theories, like the extreme sexism, the violence, the right-wing American dreamism, and so on. 'You're all wrong,' Harland mumbled. 'What's important is that there isn't a single sentence in those books that is more than 25 words long. And that is what news writing is all about.' A brilliant point. News needs to be sharp and snappy.

And never put huge amounts of numbers in the intro. There is nothing worse than an intro that reads, 'The City of Johannesburg yesterday pledged R5 billion to raise the standards of the lives of one million of its poorest inhabitants by giving them each a grant of R20 000, which will result in 200 000 new houses being built in 15 new suburbs.'

That intro should read something like: 'There is new hope for the poorest of the poor: Johannesburg has pledged R5 billion to build 200 000 new houses. That translates into 15 new suburbs in which a million people will each get a starter grant of R20 000 to build a new house for themselves.'

It really is all in the storytelling. Because that's what we are, storytellers. Let's tell the story, accurately, in an entertaining way, and in a form that grips the attention of our readers.

And remember the mantra: 'Write the intro, and the story writes itself.'

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CHAPTER THREE

Investigative journalism

Mzilikazi wa Afrika

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My life as an investigative journalist is not all moonlight and roses. I have been called all sorts of names. I have been bombarded with various insults and I have received more death threats than gifts. I have more people pointing fingers at me than complimenting me for a job well done. I always tell my friends that investigative journalism is like working for the bomb squad – we all know that it is a dangerous job but someone has to do it because it is for a good cause.

Investigative journalism does not come with glamour or glory but a lot of hard work and sweat. There is no rubbing shoulders with celebrities, top business people or politicians in this field as investigative journalists are often treated as an enemy. That is not because the journalists are doing a bad job but rather because people do not want the public to know all the bad things they have done or are doing.

As an investigative journalist, one needs to be very disciplined, very careful and cautious, very observant and one needs to calculate every single move one makes. I do this job because I love it. It has taught me to be more disciplined,

more careful, and never to take anything for granted. In fact, investigative journalism has moulded me and made me look at life differently.

I always tell my friends that if you want people to respect you, you do not need to shoot a raging bull with your gun but hold it by its sharp horns and bring it down to the ground. And it takes not just bravery to do that, but good timing and certain skills. I, like millions of other citizens of this country, hate corruption and I will try by all means necessary to fight and expose it. I am not doing it for glory, glamour or awards but for the love of my country and my people. And I am prepared to sacrifice my life for my people and country. People must know that it is better to die for an ideal that will live than to live for an ideal that will die.

Sometimes, I am asked whether there is a difference between investigative journalism and the other beats. There is indeed a fine line. It is like asking a member of public whether there is difference between a police inspector and a police sergeant. For most the answer will be no, but if you ask any police officer the same question the answer will definitely be yes.

To me, investigative journalism is taking the story a step further, giving it more meat. In other beats, reporters tend to rely on press statements or news conferences without trying to answer some of the questions that are raised right there in front of them. In 1998, while working as a crime reporter for African Eye News Service in Nelspruit, I exposed two serial killers who were operating in Thohoyandou in Limpopo Province and Piet Retief in Mpumalanga. When I wrote my first story that there were two serial killers on the loose, everyone – from senior policemen to junior staff – denied it. But I had kept all the press releases. While going through them I realised that 12 people had been killed (seven in Mpumalanga and five in Limpopo) in the same manner in each province. The modus operandi also looked very similar in each area. A task team was formed after my initial story was published because the then national police commissioner wanted answers. By the time the killer in Thohoyandou was arrested, he had already killed more than ten people, including two police officers. The killer in Mpumalanga was linked to more than 20 murders when he was finally arrested.

The point I am trying to make is that instead of writing up the press releases, I went a step further. I analysed press statements for details that had apparently not even been noticed by the same police officers who were issuing them on a daily basis. It is true that all journalists, whether entertainment reporters or sports writers, should go a step further and probe deeper into

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their particular subject, but many of them don't. Their reasons are many, from the demands of daily deadlines to sheer laziness. Too many rely on press releases for the principal source of their stories.

Time is any journalist's worst enemy. However, it takes time to do a proper investigation and it takes time to do proper research.

It also costs a lot of money to do proper research. Driving or flying around to meet the people who are your sources is expensive. So too is spending hours on the phone, speaking to experts and witnesses. Sometimes, when investigating stories on those ultra-powerful people we call the 'untouchables', you have to be prepared for a 'fight'. You start getting death threats. Strangers follow you around. Suspicious 'sales consultants' come to your house to sell you products that don't even exist. When you walk into your favourite bar, everybody leaves. When you bump into your friends on the street, they pretend they don't see you. When you get phone calls telling you 'we know where your kids go to school', you worry about your family. 'Drop the story,' I have been told, 'or we will drop your child's head on your doorstep.'

Times like these are hard, stressful and scary. I have endured them many times. It is during times like these that you prove what you are made of as a journalist. Do you have the courage to hold a raging bull by its sharp horns and bring it to its knees? You can't afford to make mistakes. The threats are real and they force you to make important decisions about your future and about your family's safety.

If you do find yourself working on a tough, investigative case involving powerful people, here are a few tips:

- Organise your security first: warn your partner, speak to the teachers not to let strangers fetch your kids after school, ask your security company to keep a guard outside your house or on your street on a 24-hour basis. Do not take any chances, keep your family's security tight. If schools are closed, send your children away on holiday.
- Do not drop the story because of death threats or threatening phone calls. Show the people who are threatening you that you are not one of the generations of cowards. Stick to your guns.
- Work on your story carefully, watch your back and expose those who are bad or corrupt. The more you expose them without fear, the more they respect you for what you stand for.

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I prefer working as part of a team rather than alone, because as a team you can watch one another's backs. You can also work smarter as each person deals with particular aspects of the same subject.

Before any story is written or published, a journalist has to read thousands of pages either as documents or on the Internet, make more than a dozen phone calls, meet strange people in strange places, and spend hours working on the story in his or her head. You can work very hard and get all the facts, but it is how you present your story that counts at the end of the day. People, especially *Sunday Times* readers, may remember the sweating handshake with Tony Yengeni; while it is true that your story has to be straight to the point, those extra details – like someone wearing a pink tie or eating with a plastic spoon – are also important.

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Investigative story 1: Buying an identity

In 1999, I was in a minibus taxi from Johannesburg to Nelspruit when I overheard passengers from Mozambique talking about how they 'bought' their South African identity documents from Home Affairs at Harrison Street, downtown Johannesburg. When I came back to Johannesburg, I went to the same Home Affairs office, where I pretended to be an illegal immigrant and I bought myself an ID book. The same investigation caused the former Home Affairs Director-General Albert Mokoena to lose his job. This was the first story that I wrote on buying an ID book:

■ ■ ■

Sunday Times – 7 March 1999

WE BUST FAKE ID RACKET
For just R300 you can buy a new life – and an illegal vote

SUNDAY TIMES SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

The head of South Africa's busiest Home Affairs office fled and locked himself in a parking basement yesterday when confronted with proof of widescale ID document fraud in his department.

A *Sunday Times* team presented Dumisani Buthelezi, acting regional representative for the Department of Home Affairs in Johannesburg, with an ID document bought by a reporter posing as an illegal alien.

Buthelezi and his deputy, Ben Makgalemela, refused to answer questions and ran down a flight of stairs into the basement and locked the door.

In a telephone interview 15 minutes later, Buthelezi confessed that he was linked to the sale of ID documents, saying: 'Yes, I am involved.'

The dramatic confrontation followed a three-week investigation which found that new temporary and permanent ID documents were being sold illegally by officials in the Home Affairs office in Harrison Street, Johannesburg.

The documents can be used for voter registration, undermining the government's huge drive for a fraud-free election.

Independent Electoral Commission officials at registration points were stunned when shown an ID document bought by the team. It bears a false ID number and the name of a fictitious man, Mfukwa Joseph Mbowani.

The Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Lindiwe Sisulu, said she was shocked by the findings. She thanked the team for exposing the alleged corruption, saying it would be fully investigated.

Sunday Times reporter Mzilikazi wa Afrika went undercover on February 19 in a bid to buy an ID book. Outside the Harrison Street office, he was approached by an 'agent', who gave his name as Simile Reginald Ndiza. Ndiza said the price for a temporary ID was R300. The money was exchanged in a small room in the basement of an adjoining building. An hour later, Ndiza returned from the Home Affairs building with a receipt which falsely stated that the applicant had submitted a birth and baptismal certificate.

'If you want a bar-coded ID book, come with R2 000 – our boss will fix everything for you,' Ndiza said.

On February 25, the reporter paid the R2 000 in a nearby municipal toilet and supplied ID photos. Ndiza disappeared into the Home Affairs building and returned two hours later with an official temporary ID document – which has the status of a complete ID book. Besides registration, it can be used to open a bank account and buy property.

Ndiza said the bar-coded ID book would be ready in three days – but later said they had 'problems' getting the book as inspectors were monitoring the building. The book was to have been handed over on Friday, but officials involved in the scam disappeared after another customer stormed into the building, demanding a driver's licence he had paid for.

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However, the team pinpointed a number of officials involved in processing the documents. The middleman between the agent, who operates at street level, and Home Affairs officials is a man known as 'Oupa'.

During negotiations for the ID book, Ndiza and Oupa introduced the reporter to an official in inquiries booth 15, identified as Johan Victor. Meetings were arranged away from his desk – either on the street or in a quiet corner of the building.

On Friday, Victor said: 'We are very busy with all these people coming here to get their temporary ID books to register to vote. I don't have time to get out your ID book. Please come back on Monday and it will be ready.'

On Friday Wa Afrika met Buthelezi and showed him the documents purchased from his officials. Buthelezi said he was aware of a 'major scam' among his officials and promised to meet our team yesterday morning in order to confront those implicated. However, yesterday the team was told he was not in the building.

They were introduced to Makgalemela, who said Buthelezi was not at work. But seconds later Buthelezi was seen in the main foyer. When confronted by the team, he shouted: 'I don't want to speak to you – I don't like your tactics.'

He walked to a nearby lift with Makgalemela. The team followed them and they ran down a flight of stairs into the basement, locking the door behind them.

The national Director-General of Home Affairs, Albert Mokoena, said he had been told by Buthelezi that the *Sunday Times* had uncovered an ID racket at the Harrison Street office. But he could not explain why the man had run and locked himself away.

Sisulu said the department believed the bar-coded ID had the least chance of being corrupted.

She said the IEC had discovered that a 'sizeable number' of people registered were not South Africans. But once registration was complete, the voters' roll would be compared to the population register to weed out the corruption, she said.

■ ■ ■

When I contacted Albert Mokoena, the Director-General of the Home Affairs Department at the time, for comment on the above story, he made two mistakes: first he asked me not to publish the story and then he accused me of trying to please my 'white' bosses. I told him that I was going ahead and would publish anyway. Mokoena said to me: '*Morena* [which simply means 'sir'], why are you doing this to your own brothers just to please your white bosses?'

The Monday after the story was published, Mokoena was on radio attacking

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me. He accused me of bribing vulnerable Home Affairs officials, which was news to me. I had never bribed anyone; I had only paid the amount that was demanded from me in order to get my South African identity book.

My next step was to find out more about Albert Mokoena. Who was he? Where did he come from? What was his background? And why was he seemingly defending corruption in his own department?

I started asking people about him. Somebody told me Mokoena owned a Premier League basketball team. I went to the league website to check some of the facts about his team. Four things caught my attention. The first was the contact telephone number for his basketball team, which was listed with a Pretoria dialling code (012). By then I knew that Mokoena was living somewhere around Johannesburg. I phoned the number and a woman who answered the phone said: 'Home Affairs Department, the DG's office – how can I help you?' I told the woman that I was a basketball player who wanted to send a fax to Mokoena; she told me that he was not in the office but I could send my fax to a number (a Home Affairs Department number) that was also listed on the basketball league website.

After I dropped the phone, I went through the list of his players. Here were the other three things that caught my attention. There was a player called Boniface Kambongo whose place of birth was listed as Soweto, another player called Humphrey Mapulango whose place of birth was listed as Benoni and Billy Banda whose place of birth was also listed as Soweto. These players caught my attention because I knew that, except for Banda, we do not have such surnames in South Africa. After I did more research, I was convinced that Mokoena was running a basketball team from his Home Affairs office and that he had organised false South African identity books for some of his players who were really illegal immigrants.

Further information revealed that the three players used to play for the Zambian national basketball team as they had been born there. In fact, the Zambian Basketball Association had written a letter to the South African government about these players.

Once I had written my first Mokoena story, I received a number of anonymous phone calls and fax messages giving me more details and new information about him. The more I wrote about him, the more information I received. In order to avoid any mistakes in a story, a journalist must ask his or her colleagues to play devil's advocate: tell them your story, what you have found and how you worked on it and let them pose questions. If there are holes in

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your story, then you have to go back to the drawing board and fill them in before it is published. Always remember that you don't have to rush and publish a half-baked story, rather wait a day or two to have a well-balanced story.

This was my next story:

■ ■ ■

Sunday Times – 21 March 1999

BUTHELEZI TO CONFRONT HIS DG AFTER PROBE SHOWS HE RUNS SPORTS TEAM FROM OFFICE

Mzilikazi Wa Afrika

Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi this week urged the *Sunday Time*s to expose his Director-General, Albert Mokoena, after an investigation established he was running a basketball team from the department's Pretoria head office.

Mokoena owns and manages a professional basketball team, Mecer Soweto Panthers, in contravention of the Public Service Act. Buthelezi said he found the information that Mokoena had a basketball team 'disturbing'. 'He did not ask permission from me to own the team. I will confront him.'

Yesterday, Mokoena denied that he was violating the Act, which forbids government employees from using office equipment for private business without permission. It also forbids them to do any private work connected with any official duties without permission.

But it has been established that:

Mokoena used his Home Affairs telephone and fax to run his basketball business. The numbers also appear on the team's Internet website;

As Director-General of Home Affairs, he dealt with the final work-permit applications for foreign players whom he recruited for his team; and

He sought a R543 000 sponsorship for the Panthers from a computer company, Cenit, at a time when it had a three-year service contract with the department. The company refused his request.

Dr Sandi Baai, director of ethics at the Public Service Commission, said the Public Protector should investigate this case. 'If there is proof that Mokoena is violating the code and that there is a case for conflict of interest then the necessary steps should be taken against him,' he said.

The *Sunday Times* three weeks ago exposed a major illegal ID racket in the Harrison Street, Johannesburg, offices of Home Affairs. At the time, Mokoena

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slammed the investigation as 'irresponsible'. But yesterday he promised to apologise for what he said in newspapers and on radio.

Buthelezi, meanwhile, applauded the *Sunday Times* investigation into his department. 'We need this kind of cooperation between civil society and government if we are to uproot corruption.'

Mokoena said he did not believe he needed to ask permission, as required by the Act, from Buthelezi to own the Panthers, as he had put this detail in his CV. 'Buthelezi saw my CV – he employed me.'

He admitted his private office telephone and fax numbers were used to conduct the team's business. But he saw nothing wrong with this.

Mokoena said he did not believe that using the telephone and fax at taxpayers' expense to run his privately owned basketball team was a problem.

'I spend a lot of time in my office and I need to contact people. I think many civil servants do this.'

Mokoena admitted that he checked the final applications for work permits by foreign basketball players – his team has eight foreigners – but did not see any conflict of interest in this.

Mokoena also denied that he had ever sent a request to Cenit for sponsorship or received a response. But a former director of Cenit, Johan Smook, confirmed that a request for sponsorship had been received from Mokoena in February last year and that a month later the company had sent him a letter saying it was not interested. The *Sunday Times* has a copy of the letter.

■ ■ ■

I continued with painstakingly careful investigations, writing a series of stories about Mokoena, his players and how the former Minister of Home Affairs Mangosuthu Buthelezi tried to protect him.

After nine months of investigative stories, Mokoena finally resigned in September 1999. I was proud of my investigation and I was very happy that I had not made a single mistake. If I had, the newspaper could have been sued for millions of rands.

It was after this that the then *Sunday Times* editor, Mike Robertson, decided to start the *Sunday Times*' Investigations Unit.

From the day the unit was formed until today, we have never been successfully sued, although a number of people have tried to intimidate us with lawsuits and legal threats.

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Investigative story 2: Human trade

One day, in January 1999, I was sent on an undercover trip to Mozambique. I knew I was risking my life. For two nights, my wife cried and begged me not to go. But I told her that someone was doing something that was terribly wrong and I was prepared to risk my life to expose him. 'If I die along the way,' I told her, 'I would have died in the line of duty. And I would have died for something that I believed in.'

I went to Mozambique because I wanted to expose a modern slave trader, a man who had made it his business to sell other human beings. He was making thousands of rands selling illegal Mozambican immigrants, whom he smuggled in through the borders, for cheap labour in South Africa. Those immigrants were not my blood relatives but were my African brothers and sisters – and I was prepared to risk my life for them.

I first heard of John Nkuna in May 1997, when I was a crime reporter for African Eye News Service, a news agency based in Nelspruit. I received a police report that a minibus taxi had overturned near the Komatipoort border post at about 4am. All 21 passengers died on the scene. I suspected that the story was bigger than the police were letting on.

The story ended up being such a good one because I did not treat the initial news item as just another police accident report.

My first question was: where did the taxi driver pick up 21 passengers at 4am? My second question was: where were they going at that time? I later established that all the passengers were foreign nationals who had just been smuggled into South Africa from neighbouring countries. I took down the vehicle registration number of the taxi and traced its owner, a man called John Nkuna. I followed Nkuna's activities for months. It soon became clear that he was a modern-day slave trader. It was then that I decided to cross the border into Mozambique. I would pretend to be a Mozambican who wanted to come to South Africa.

I researched the story for a number of months and I planned it very carefully. Before I left for Mozambique, I knew exactly what to do, where I was supposed to go and how I was supposed to approach my investigation. My newspaper, the *Sunday Times*, gave me its full support; without this I would not have managed to expose Nkuna or taken my investigation to that level.

On 24 January 1999, the *Sunday Times* published the story about my trip to Mozambique. It explained how the slave trader, John Nkuna, tried to kill

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me and how he dumped me in the middle of the Kruger National Park with the hope that lions and other dangerous wild animals would finish me off.

Here is the story that was run:

■ ■ ■

Sunday Times – 24 January 1999

THE MAN WHO TRADES IN HUMAN BEINGS

Reporter Mzilikazi Wa Afrika describes his ordeal at the hands of a slave trader.

This is the man who smuggled scores of illegal immigrants into South Africa, selling them to businesses and farmers in Mpumalanga and Gauteng.

Joseph 'Sols' Nkuna is also the man who beat me up after holding a gun to my head when I was flushed out of a slavery ring I had infiltrated during an investigation into the massive slave-labour trade across South Africa's borders.

Nkuna runs his business in human cargo from Mozambique and Swaziland, using safe houses in Boschfontein and Langeloop in Mpumalanga, about 20km from the Lebombo border post in Komatipoort.

Also a well-known taxi boss, Nkuna lives in the biggest house in the rural area of Nkomazi. Police say he has been caught on numerous occasions for smuggling illegal aliens into South Africa. He has been given spot fines ranging from R1 500 to R2 500, which he has paid.

Nkuna makes his money by selling illegal labour to businesses and farmers who pay up to R600 per illegal immigrant. The immigrants, who come looking for work, also pay him for finding them jobs – as much as R530 each.

He uses four vehicles to ferry people every day of the week. He owns a luxury car, three minibus taxis, a Toyota Cressida and a bakkie with the registration number BPR 509 MP, which is one of the vehicles he uses to ferry people from his safe houses to businesses. This was the bakkie I was driven around in before he discovered who I was.

On Monday I went to the offices of the Border and Internal Tracing Unit in Nelspruit, where I discussed my undercover investigation with the unit's second in charge, Inspector Cornelius du Preez.

On Tuesday morning Du Preez drove me to the Lebombo border post and I crossed the border legally. Although I was wearing very old clothing as a cover, I had to keep my passport hidden so I could prove I was there legally.

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At Ressano Garcia, a border village in Mozambique, I pretended I wanted a job in Johannesburg. A man came up to me and said I should take a taxi to Maputo, where I would meet with their 'chief' at a park. When I got to the park, I met a man who said his name was Augosto Makwakwa. He said he would help me get into South Africa and find a good job – I would have to pay him R480 in return.

But nothing came of this and, on Wednesday morning, I took a taxi back to Ressano Garcia, where I made new contacts and was taken to a safe house in the village along with four other men.

At 10pm, after 17 young men had gathered at the house, we left on a seven-hour walk to the Komatipoort border. A man who said his name was Paulos Mboweni, a Mozambican citizen, led us to where we would cross the fence.

After illegally entering South Africa, all of us were arrested by three South African National Defence Force soldiers.

The soldiers demanded R50 from each of us and took anything else they wanted – including watches and a Bible – before letting us go.

We walked another 10km and then Mboweni ordered us to wait for him. He had arranged beforehand to sell six of us – including a crippled man – to a sugar-cane farmer near Komatipoort.

We walked another 300m and, as we turned a corner, there was Nkuna, sitting in his white bakkie with the registration number BPR 509 MP.

He drove us to a safe house at Block B near Tonga. In a windowless room, Nkuna told us to strip so he could see we were not hiding more money from him.

By this time, we had all already paid him for our trip to Gauteng. I had given him R70 and told him he would get the rest when we reached Gauteng.

But it was during this sudden search that Nkuna discovered my passport and ID book, which I had tucked away in my underwear.

The modern-day slave trader went crazy, later holding a gun to my head and telling me he was going to blow my brains out.

I felt my life was about to end. It was my worst nightmare – the only thing I had feared when I first decided to infiltrate the trade in illegal labour.

Initially, I had told people my name was Carlos Bernard Bilankulu – now I had been caught out.

Nkuna was aggressive, punching me several times and screaming: 'Who the hell are you and what do you want?'

Then Nkuna began hitting me with a thick wooden pole about a metre in length, but I could not scream for help – I was too terrified.

After a while, Mboweni grabbed the pole from him. By this time, Nkuna was in a rage. He ran outside and returned with his gun.

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'I'm going to kill this dog. He wants to mess with my bread and butter – I'm going to kill him,' he said repeatedly and put the gun to my head.

I pleaded with him, telling him I was an undercover policeman investigating the smuggling into South Africa of Mozambican women who were then used as prostitutes in Johannesburg.

He replied: 'You're lying! First you said your name was Carlos and now it's Leonard. Who are you, you bastard?'

I insisted I was an undercover policeman and he threw me onto the back of his bakkie with the other immigrants.

Nkuna drove around and then dropped the others off at the sugar-cane farm. He told them there was a job there for each of them and that he would return later to collect his money.

I was still in the back of the bakkie, shaking with pain. Nkuna drove for more than 10km and suddenly stopped, dropping me off in the dark in the middle of nowhere.

I was lost and disorientated from the beating but walked for at least 12 hours before I found my way back to Nelspruit.

I then contacted Captain David Chilembe, head of the Border and Internal Tracing Unit, and told him I knew of at least 10 illegal immigrants who had just been smuggled into South Africa – and where Nkuna had been holding them.

Police raided a number of houses in the area, arresting eight illegal immigrants on property belonging to Nkuna. Five of them told police they had been with me and witnessed the beating I had received from Nkuna.

They told me they knew Nkuna well because some of them had been on the trip before, but Nkuna himself was nowhere to be found.

■ ■ ■

Nobody told me about Nkuna and his slave-trading business or about his criminal activities. The story ended up being such a good one because I did not treat the initial news item as just another police accident report. I approached it differently, came up with a well-researched story and won a number of awards for it. It's also important to follow up on your stories and not just sit back and enjoy the glory. Although Nkuna was on the run for months, like a vulture I followed his whereabouts to the end. And one day, greedy as he was, he made a big mistake: he tried to sell a 15-year-old boy to his own father. He was arrested and sentenced to 25 years in jail.

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Investigative story 3: The Yengeni saga

Although our unit covered a lot of stories and exposed a number of people, one story stands above the rest. It was this story that taught us as a unit a lot about investigative journalism. We were attacked from many angles but we did not give up our investigation.

In November 2000, *Sunday Times* publisher, Mike Robertson, asked the unit to look at whether there was any truth to rumours of corruption surrounding the relatively new government's purchase of arms to the value of around R43 billion. Our mandate was simple and straightforward: if we find anything fishy, we must pursue it. If we find the deal is clean, we say so and drop the probe.

We worked through thousands of documents and newspaper archives about the arms deal and made more than a thousand phone calls chasing up leads. We met some strange people in strange places.

We started our investigations at the beginning: Where and how did the allegations about corruption in the arms deal start? We also looked at how the people implicated in corruption responded to the allegations. We traced a 10-page document that former Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) Member of Parliament Patricia de Lille used when she presented these allegations in Parliament, claiming that some MPs had been bribed during the course of the arms deal. We studied the document and looked at all the allegations made in it. We started speaking to people, asking whether there was any documentation to substantiate some of the allegations.

After going through the document more than a dozen times, we decided that, if it was true, the allegation that former African National Congress Chief Whip Tony Yengeni received a discounted vehicle was easiest to prove. A car has a history and the documents would show where, how and when it became Yengeni's property. We debated our approaches to the car among ourselves and drafted a long list of facts that we had to check and verify.

In February 2001, when we were convinced that there was something 'fishy' about Yengeni's four-wheel-drive vehicle, we decided to contact him so that he could clarify some of the information. I phoned Yengeni and asked him if he could answer a few questions about his car. He told me that he did not want to discuss his car or the arms deal over the phone and that if I was prepared, I should come to his office in Cape Town and meet him face to face the following day.

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I flew down to Cape Town from Johannesburg, as agreed, but when I arrived at his office he told me he had been advised by some of his comrades not to talk to the media about his car or the arms deal. He also assured me that there was nothing fishy about his car. I went back to Johannesburg empty-handed, but we did not change our minds. We decided to pursue the story and looked at how we could present it without Yengeni's comments.

When we were satisfied with our investigations, we sent another list of questions to Yengeni and still he refused to respond to them. After triple-checking our facts, we published the story and the rest, as they say, is history:

■ ■ ■

Sunday Times – 25 March 2001

TONY YENGENI, THE 4X4 AND THE R43-BILLION ARMS PROBE

Mzilikazi Wa Afrika, Jessica Bezuidenhout and André Jurgens

Today we reveal how Tony Yengeni, the ANC's Chief Whip in Parliament, ended up with a luxury Mercedes-Benz 4x4, which manufacturer DaimlerChrysler says it never sold him;

How the car was ordered as a 'staff car' by DaimlerChrysler Aerospace South Africa (DASA), a company linked to the R43-billion arms deal; and

How Stannic denies financing the car, although this is stated on Yengeni's registration records.

Computer print-outs from DaimlerChrysler show the car was ordered as a 'private staff vehicle' by DaimlerChrysler Aerospace (DASA) which, through a joint venture, secured a contract to supply tracking radars for the corvettes purchased in the arms-deal package.

When the *Sunday Times* walked into Tony Yengeni's office in Parliament at noon 30 days ago, there were beads of sweat on his brow. Shaking reporter Mzilikazi wa Afrika's hand, the well-built MP said: 'Why is your hand sweating like that?'

'No,' said Wa Afrika, holding up his: 'It's not my hand that is sweating, but yours, Mr Yengeni.'

The award-winning investigative reporter was there to find out how a vehicle ordered by a company involved in the R43-billion arms deal had come to be in the possession of Yengeni, who, as Chief Whip of the ANC, is one of the most

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powerful men in Parliament. He was also head of the Joint Standing Committee for Defence, which had played a key role in the decision to buy the arms in the first place.

The vehicle in question is a state-of-the-art Mercedes-Benz ML320 4x4. The price tag when it was delivered nearly three years ago was R359 000 – without any fancy extras. Buyers were offered the choice of extras like an electric glass sunroof, tinted windows and a fabulous Bose sound system.

Yengeni's 4x4 had plush body-hugging beige leather seats, tinted windows and metallic green paintwork.

The first official records on the vehicle show that it was dispatched from DaimlerChrysler's East London plant on 15 September 1998. It arrived at the company's Johannesburg stockyard on 19 October.

But on October 22, three days after it was delivered to Johannesburg, the vehicle was registered in the name of Tony Yengeni in Pretoria. A few days later it was licensed in Cape Town – in Yengeni's name.

Traffic department records give the vehicle's details: registration number (CA 80233), chassis number (WDC 1631542A048577) and engine number (112942302 03839).

The same records list the titleholder – the banking institution, which owns a car until it is fully paid up – as being Stannic.

But bank sources deny this. Stannic says it can find no record of any agreement on this vehicle and that the last motor-vehicle financing agreement between Stannic and Yengeni was for a different car in 1993.

And then there is the puzzling matter of the insurance.

Banks that finance vehicle purchases are reluctant to hand the money over to motor dealers (who hold the car keys) until the buyer can produce proof of comprehensive insurance cover.

Elmarie Barac, customer liaison officer at Stannic, said the Credit Agreement Act made it the duty of a person getting credit to ensure that a car was comprehensively insured.

But this Mercedes-Benz, ostensibly financed by Stannic, appeared to remain uninsured for five months.

On 12 March 1999 – 140 days after the 4x4 was first registered in his name – Yengeni signed an insurance agreement with Millionsure.

Before then, the popular MP had already collected the first of two traffic fines for disobeying the rules of the road on a busy Cape Town street.

His first brush with Cape Town's traffic officers was on 2 March 1999, when the driver of the 4x4 disobeyed a traffic directional arrow while cruising along the

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city's busy Klipfontein Road. The driver, who received a R150 ticket, was listed as the MP at his current home address.

Exactly a fortnight later, on 16 March, the dark-green vehicle with tinted windows collected a second traffic violation for exactly the same offence along the same road. A second R150 ticket was made out to Yengeni.

Both remain unpaid – a matter traffic officers were unable to explain this week.

Nevertheless, the car then headed off for its first inspection service on 23 April. Records show the inspection, which did not reveal any major mechanical problems, was done on behalf of Yengeni, named as the 'customer'.

A month later, rumours began circulating in the corridors of Parliament that Yengeni had received the car as a 'gift'.

This is where the whole saga took a puzzling turn that has left a trail of unanswered questions.

Documents in the possession of the *Sunday Times* show that it was only at this point that Yengeni started paying monthly instalments for the 4x4.

Seven months after the vehicle was registered in his name, Yengeni entered into a finance agreement with DaimlerChrysler Financial Services (Debis) on 28 May 1999.

The question, investigators probing the arms deal are asking themselves, is why? If, as Stannic states, it played no role in financing the deal, then Yengeni's registration forms contained incorrect, possibly fraudulent information. On the other hand, if Yengeni had entered into a finance agreement with Stannic, why did he need to enter into another one with Debis eight months later?

Had he been loaned the vehicle for seven months, he would have been obliged to record this fact in terms of Parliament's Code of Members' Interests.

Yengeni's signed list of declared items for 1998 makes no mention of a Mercedes-Benz.

What is known is that a Cape Town newspaper published a letter in July 1999 suggesting that Yengeni should explain how he came to own the vehicle. Two months later, on 11 September, Yengeni summoned a group of journalists to his office where, waving a sheaf of papers in the air, he protested his innocence.

Yengeni told the journalists that the papers in his hands were bank statements and said they were proof that he was paying for his car. Three of the journalists present say he did not allow them to read the documents. Yengeni says he did.

Four days later, on 15 September, Cabinet announced it had concluded the controversial arms deal. PAC MP Patricia de Lille then made startling allegations of corruption relating to the arms deal, naming several prominent politicians, including Yengeni.

In the months that followed more allegations about bribery and corruption

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playing a role in the arms deal surfaced but matters came to a head in September 2000 when Auditor-General Shauket Fakie submitted a report to Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts, suggesting that a forensic audit be carried out into aspects of the arms deal.

The committee was flooded with more allegations of corruption and shortly thereafter it was suggested that a whole team of investigators, including the Auditor-General, the Public Protector and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, be appointed to undertake a full-scale investigation.

Yengeni moved into the spotlight in January this year when Andrew Feinstein, ANC leader on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, was removed from his post. Feinstein had been vocal in his support for a thorough investigation of the arms deal.

Yengeni, in his capacity as ANC Chief Whip, replaced him with Geoff Doidge. The move was seen by political observers as an attempt by the ANC to bolster the committee with party loyalists.

At the same time, President Thabo Mbeki announced that Judge Willem Heath would not take part in the investigation.

While these political developments were being played out, the *Sunday Times* started gathering documents on the arms deal and identified several issues that needed to be investigated. One of them was how Yengeni got his 4x4.

The newspaper telephoned Yengeni on 22 February requesting a meeting to discuss the allegations around the car.

Yengeni agreed to a meeting and asked reporter Wa Afrika to fly to Cape Town the following day. Yengeni agreed to bring all the necessary vehicle documents to the meeting.

The sweaty handshake kicked off an hour-long meeting in which Yengeni described the allegations against him as 'hogwash'. Wa Afrika switched on his tape recorder, telling Yengeni he wanted an accurate record of their discussion.

Well-known as the nattiest dresser in Parliament, Yengeni was not wearing the R1 000 suit given to him by Fabiani, one of Cape Town's most expensive designer boutiques on the V&A Waterfront. He was casually dressed in a simple short-sleeved shirt and a pair of jeans.

Yengeni refused to produce any of the documents that could have, within minutes, proved his innocence once and for all.

'I am saying to you I am not going to answer your questions now or ever and if you still want to continue, you can go to the other guys, the journalists [summoned to his September press conference] who were here,' said Yengeni.

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He said he was aware that investigators had trawled through his personal and financial details. If they had questions, he would gladly answer them, but he would not respond to the *Sunday Times*.

'There is a due process under way in the so-called arms deal. I respect this process. I will submit myself to it, as well as fully cooperate with the investigation. I will not submit myself to a witch hunt by the *Sunday Times*,' Yengeni insisted.

He said three legal bodies were conducting the arms investigation: 'Now we can't have an investigation by the police and the *Sunday Times* running its own parallel investigation.'

He then challenged the *Sunday Times*: 'Go to the traffic department to find the information about the car.'

A number of traffic department records with details of Yengeni's car had already arrived anonymously at the *Sunday Times* office. As suggested, the *Sunday Times* approached the traffic department to seek the truth.

It was during this search that the *Sunday Times* traced the two unpaid fines.

Yengeni also said: 'Everything is registered and it is legal. The information is with the banks.'

We approached Stannic where sources said there was no record of the bank financing the vehicle.

Taking note of Yengeni's protest that allegations about him were 'hogwash', the *Sunday Times* then ran a check through a company called Hire Purchase Information (HPI). Every hire-purchase deal anywhere in the country is stored in a central database in Pretoria by HPI. But HPI's only record relating to the 4x4 was Yengeni's deal with DaimlerChrysler Financial Services on 28 May 1999.

Still searching for answers, the *Sunday Times* headed for DaimlerChrysler whose representatives at first seemed to know less about the vehicle than us, and became increasingly nervous as we asked more questions.

In the meantime, our team succeeded in obtaining a full history of the vehicle from DaimlerChrysler's own computer system, which showed clearly that DASA had ordered it as a 'staff' car. The documents were delivered anonymously to the *Sunday Times*.

DaimlerChrysler spokesman Annelise van der Laan said: 'DaimlerChrysler South Africa has no record of selling an ML320 to Mr Yengeni.'

Her statement did not, however, explain whether DASA had sold him the vehicle.

'As we have now been made aware of various allegations, we have launched our own internal investigation into the matter in order to establish the full facts,' she said.

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The *Sunday Times* waited for news of the DaimlerChrysler investigation. Two weeks later, we faxed DaimlerChrysler a complete list of questions.

These included whether DASA had ordered the vehicle as a staff car, whether there was any record at all of DaimlerChrysler ever having sold the vehicle to Yengeni or having any record of a finance agreement with him.

We asked if any deposit had been paid and whether the motor group had sponsored overseas trips by Yengeni.

The last question was asked because Yengeni, in a public disclosure to Parliament, acknowledged that DaimlerChrysler had sponsored his trip to an air show in Chile and the Daimler-Benz plant in Brazil in 1998.

Media relations manager Lulama Chakela responded: 'It has come to our attention that the issues you are investigating are contained in a judicial inquiry which, as you are aware, the South African government has instituted on the much-publicised arms deal.

'The matter is therefore sub judice and any information DaimlerChrysler may have at its disposal which may have material bearing on the case cannot be discussed with the *Sunday Times* or any other interested party outside the judicial process.'

We then turned to DASA, hoping it could explain how its car had landed up in Yengeni's hands.

DASA was incorporated two years ago into the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS).

The company issued a brief statement signed by Melanie Grobbelaar, personal assistant to managing director Michael Woerfel. It said government had 'instituted a judicial inquiry' and EADS was 'obliged to respect this process'. They declined to reveal any further information.

Yengeni told Wa Afrika: 'I am very, very clear about this matter. Those that have information must take it to the police. I am a law-abiding citizen.

'I have got nothing to hide. The investigators must investigate this,' he said.

They are. An official investigation into how Yengeni obtained the car is under way by the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, the Public Protector and Auditor-General.

Yengeni's entire file at DaimlerChrysler has been attached and several staff members subpoenaed by the investigation team.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Political reporting

Angela Quintal

It's the eve of Freedom Day. I'm hurtling down the M3 in Cape Town with my mother and partner, late for a dinner appointment. 'Slow down,' I urge him, 'it's not worth getting us killed.' I'm annoyed. I hate being late and to top it all I'm not even sure where to find Sessel Street. At that moment my cellphone rings. It's 7.37pm. A familiar name appears on the screen identifying the caller. It's Mario Ambrosini, special adviser to Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi. For a split second I think I should ignore it. I'll call back the next morning and apologise. After all I'm on leave, but curiosity gets the better of me. Ambrosini, who is aware of my newspaper's early deadline, asks: 'Can we still get something into your paper? We've decided to withdraw our electoral court challenge.'

With the IFP and the African National Congress (ANC) still negotiating about cabinet posts in KwaZulu-Natal and with speculation that Buthelezi may still be offered a national post in President Thabo Mbeki's new administration, I know I'm onto something. The adrenalin kicks in. I hunt

for a pen in my bag, but there's no paper. I whip out two business cards and begin writing on the back as Ambrosini reads a short statement by Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Barely into the second paragraph, my pen packs up and I ask Ambrosini to hold on. Thankfully my mom has a pen and also offers her address book as a notebook. I'm back in business and within minutes I have the rest of the statement. I ask a few questions. Ambrosini declines to comment further. It's 7.43pm, minutes to deadline and there's no time to get reaction.

I phone my Johannesburg news desk. My colleague Joel answers the phone. He passes on my message to the night editor Alex. I'm told they have something about it in the lead story, a mere throw-away line and don't need anything extra. Odd, I thought this was breaking news. I'm deflated. However, Joel says there's no harm in accepting two paragraphs and the next thing I'm on the line to Alex. I explain what I have and Alex exclaims: 'That's definitely news! We don't have they're withdrawing the case. We only have it's going ahead on Wednesday.' I duly dictate my copy. It's 7.50pm and we've made the deadline. It's a great feeling. I know that when I open *ThisDay* on Tuesday morning we will not be shown up by any of our competitors who have later deadlines and may still receive an official statement from the IFP's headquarters in Durban.

Lying in bed the next day, tuned into TV2 for the 10 Years of Democracy celebrations, I watch the 6am news. Top story is the IFP's withdrawal of its court case. Thank heaven I didn't ignore that call. I fetch my newspaper and there it is on the front page headlined: 'IFP drops legal challenge to election.' There's an enormous sense of satisfaction.

I use this example to show that political reporting is not about rewriting mundane statements e-mailed or faxed to an office. It includes many things, like good contacts, flexibility, professionalism, being available at all hours, teamwork, the competitive edge and, most importantly, enjoying one's job.

It was Plato who said that one of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors. The same can be said about poor political reporting. Most South African media houses woke up to the fact that there was a dearth of political reporters when they realised the third democratic election was around the corner. Several newspapers and broadcasters began hunting for political editors. One Sunday newspaper even went outside the industry and for a brief period an academic headed its political team.

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Newspapers also needed political staff and the small pool of political correspondents and reporters were in heaven. They were headhunted by several organisations and were in a position to pick and choose. Political reporters had replaced finance reporters as a dying breed. The effect of years of neglect in political journalism was evident in the 2004 election coverage, particularly in the print media. Some newspapers tried to be innovative. Anyone who could report was pulled in. A former *Playboy* editor and award-winning journalist with an eye for colour became a temporary presidential correspondent for President Thabo Mbeki's election campaign.

So for the foreseeable future, if you're one of the country's few political reporters or if you're contemplating a career in political journalism, job prospects remain good. But what happened to the political reporters who mushroomed after the 1990 unbanning of the ANC and PAC? Where are the reporters who covered the Codesa multiparty negotiations, the first democratic elections and the first democratic government and Parliament?

Some of them can be found in management and no longer at the coalface. Others have become public servants earning higher salaries as government spokespersons or strategists. Or else they are working in the private sector, particularly in the large mining houses. There were also the 'pale males' who opted for voluntary retrenchment packages in several newsroom purges. After the first five years of democratic rule there appeared to be a belief that the political story was over. As newsroom cutbacks set in, political reporting became less of a priority. With Mbeki centralising power in Pretoria, parliamentary bureaus were rationalised in line with a short-sighted belief that the story would be found in the administrative, not legislative capital. Thankfully, some media bosses have experienced a change of heart and are committed to improving political coverage and giving it space in their newspapers. Johncom and the Independent Group, for example, beefed up their parliamentary bureaus in Cape Town, where much of the national political coverage is still generated. Perhaps when the next Cabinet briefing week is set up, there will be tougher questions and fewer reporters sitting with a mouthful of teeth. Diplomats attending the biannual briefing week in 2004 expressed surprise at how journalists had given the politicians an easy ride. The majority of reporters appeared meek, unprepared and unable to engage the Cabinet Ministers on issues.

Sunday Times Managing Editor, Ray Hartley – a former political correspondent – is brutal about the state of political journalism. He questions

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the lack of analysis and debate about government policy and dismisses a lot of the writing about President Mbeki and the government as 'hagiography'.

While the government may have its media *imbongis* (praise singers), much of the problem lies with inexperienced political reporters and poor newsroom leadership. There is little mentoring and training. There is an over-reliance on press statements and little own-generated copy. The same old analysts with the same old ideas are trotted out for the obligatory analysis. Reporting on the president, for example, often revolves around the latest statement issued by the Democratic Alliance. Opposition parties that have slick communications machinery often set the news agenda and it's easy to fall into the trap of merely regurgitating their statements to fill space.

However, the government must also share the blame, since many of its spokespersons fail to grasp the essentials of their job, namely, to communicate. Others are not empowered to do so by their principals who have a deep mistrust of the media. The foreign ministry is a regular witness to my frustrations of reporting on Pretoria's view on a range of foreign policy issues. It is not too difficult to understand that South African reporters want to be informed by their own government and not what a foreign government spokesman has reportedly told an international news agency. Invariably, I am left none the wiser on Pretoria's view. It is one of the most frustrating parts of the job and also shows that if you want information, often it's best not to rely on the official government 'communicators'. Stick to the Cabinet Minister or deputy in question, or speak to the backroom officials and public servants who are often better informed and better placed to provide the facts, insight and context.

Key to political reporting is good contacts and that involves creating a relationship of trust.

The same applies to political parties. While party spokespersons are there to give you the official version and spin, it is also important to cultivate party officials, ordinary MPs and employees, who if they trust you will often prove to be invaluable contacts.

A story about the cash-strapped ANC failing to pay its workers during November 2003 was sourced from mid-level ANC officials and corroborated by ordinary party employees. Official spokespersons hid behind the usual comment that the ANC did not discuss party finances in public.

Key to political reporting is good contacts and that involves creating a relationship of trust. If you are perceived to be accurate and fair you'll find

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that many people across the political spectrum will be prepared to talk to you. To borrow from *The Mail & Guardian's* Robert Kirby, if you're not regarded as someone's 'Wetwipe', you're more likely to find that you have diverse contacts and credibility. The importance of networking cannot be over-emphasised. You might not enjoy the cocktail circuit and may hate small talk, but it is a great opportunity to expand your contact base and you'll be amazed at the information that you can pick up.

One needs to talk to people from all walks of life and not only the politicians and the public servants. Speak to the NGOs, the CBOs, the extra-parliamentary groupings, the academics, the analysts, the unionists, workers, diplomats, Joe Soap, anyone who is willing to talk. Collect names and telephone numbers. I once worked for a news organisation where many reporters did not have their own contact book. Over the years I've accumulated four plastic folders of 50 double-sided A4 pages filled with contact numbers. I also have numbers in my personal organiser, as well as a directory of contacts provided by the Government Communication and Information System, Parliament and the many useful contact numbers on the government website (www.gov.za) and other Internet sites.

I share the view that if you're not interested in politics then don't waste your time reporting on it. It's essential to have a good general knowledge, a keen interest in current affairs, as well as international relations, the economy and history. If you want to do a good job, it's important to read as much as you can, including several newspapers, magazines and books. While Finance Minister Trevor Manuel continues to resist lifting VAT on books, one of the best ways of expanding your own collection is to write reviews. You get to keep the books! A key reference book *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, which was unaffordable, was added to my collection as a result of a review I did for *Leadership* magazine. Another way of remaining informed is to tune in to current-affairs programmes on radio and television. This will give you the knowledge, background and context to be on top of things, not only about what's going on in South Africa, but on the continent and elsewhere. Check the South African Press Association (SAPA) and the news sites on the Internet throughout the day. Often you will be able to identify potential stories from disparate news reports, or will find information that you can follow up and weave into your own reports.

But beware. Disgraced columnist Darrel Bristow-Bovey and former *Marie Claire* editor Cynthia Vongai – who were named and shamed in 2003 for

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plagiarising – are not alone. Reporters, particulary those on daily newspapers, continue to lift SAPA or foreign news-agency copy without bothering to credit the source of information. It is immoral and the practice needs to be stamped out.

A lot can be said for teamwork. While a little internal rivalry can be healthy, no one has the monopoly on knowledge or information. Turf battles can be destructive and poisonous. Discussing potential stories and news angles or collaborating with colleagues often improves the product. Ask for advice and learn from the more experienced. Don't allow others to play you off against your colleagues or to exploit rivalries. Similarly, don't badmouth your colleagues to sources or contacts. It is highly unprofessional and destructive.

For those reporters based in Parliament, there is no excuse for empty diaries and, when both houses are in session, there's no such thing as a 'slow news day'. Over and above the committee meetings and plenary sessions, a host of documents is tabled daily. Policy documents, annual reports, white papers, the *Government Gazette*, are all good sources of information for potential news stories. Soon after the floor-crossing period in April 2003, I opened a *Government Gazette* and glanced at the reserve candidates' lists for the one-member parties that had mushroomed in Parliament. Of the five represented in the National Assembly, three were nothing more than family affairs. For example, Theresa Millin of the Independent African Movement had her son Mark as number one on her list and her husband as number three. Farouk Cassim of the Peace and Justice Congress designated his daughter Shehnaaz as number one on his list, while Nelson Ramodike of the Alliance for Democracy and Prosperity also designated his son on his list. This meant that if the instant party leaders died or resigned, their family members could step right in. The South African taxpayer would continue to pay for the pleasure of having them in Parliament, even though they had received no mandate from the electorate.

I share the view that if you're not interested in politics then don't waste your time reporting on it.

Other potential stories can be found by simply monitoring the broadcast media, which can be developed in print. I once listened to a radio interview with the president's mother, Epainette Mbeki, who was critical about her son. I was driving, but thanks to a handy dictaphone was able to tape the interview. As soon as I got to the office I wrote the report and it went out on the wires. It was used by practically every media organisation in the country,

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local and foreign. Five years later both *The Mail & Guardian* and *ThisDay* returned to Idutywa to again interview MaMbeki about her son.

After 12 years reporting on politics, I have learnt that a huge dose of scepticism is essential. If you're going to believe everything you hear, then be prepared to be suckered and run the risk of losing credibility. Always question. Don't take all you're told at face value and do your homework. Make the effort to prepare ahead of press conferences and interviews. The Internet is a useful resource tool. There's nothing worse than going to a briefing feeling out of your depth and unable to ask intelligent questions. The bottom line is that if you want to be taken seriously then act professionally. Put your prejudices and your political beliefs aside and treat everyone fairly. Don't take sides. If you want to be a propagandist then the independent media is not for you.

Don't allow yourself to be used and guard your independence jealously. Beware too of off–the-record briefings, unnamed sources and one-source journalism. Where possible, try to ensure that your source speaks on the record. 'Off-the-record' is often the refuge of the lazy or the coward, and the less journalists rely on it, the better. Make sure that when you interview someone they understand that you plan to report what they say. Often people will talk freely, only to insist at the end of an interview that what they've told you is off the record. You need to respect that, unless you can convince them to change their mind.

One of the easiest traps to fall into as a political reporter is to become too close to a source or become too reliant on one so that you lose perspective. While Ranjeni Munusamy is the more public example, she is not alone. Many journalists socialise with politicians and while this is not necessarily a problem and can benefit one's work, it can also place one in an awkward position. Are you likely to report critically on an MP with whom you're sharing a drink and whom you regard as a friend? Will you be able to remain objective? I recently thought I had come across information that would have compromised one of the whistleblowers in the arms deal. I was torn by my friendship and my duty to expose it. I agonised about it, but went ahead with inquiries. Much to my relief, my initial information was incorrect and I was spared an ethical dilemma. As a colleague describes it, politicians are Teflon-coated and will invariably bounce back, but once a journalist's credibility is gone, it's difficult to salvage.

In political reporting you're very likely to come across bullies and those drunk with their own power. Don't allow yourself to be intimidated in any way. You could well be threatened with complaints to your superior, you

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may be verbally abused, frozen out or even have statements issued to publicly denounce you by name. You could be labelled unpatriotic and receive telephone calls saying you are letting the side down, that you are providing ammunition for those with a racist agenda. If you are in the right, then don't be cowed into submission. If necessary, seek the intervention of your boss. However, if you're in the wrong, take responsibility for your actions, rather than brazen it out. Beware too that when the heat is on, some politicians and public servants have no qualms about claiming they were misquoted to save their own skin. Ensure you keep meticulous notes or, better still, that you have them on tape. There's nothing like providing the evidence to shut up a liar.

As a political correspondent with a focus on the presidency, I regularly dealt with the late presidential spokesman Parks Mankahlana, who became increasingly erratic as his health deteriorated. One night on the eve of an international Aids conference in Durban he called me with his infamous statement about the Durban Aids Declaration 'belonging in the dustbin'. I knew it was explosive, and asked him if he was sure he wanted to issue it. He insisted I should do so, but I was worried that he would repudiate it; in the same way he had denied comments he had made in a leading foreign publication. I could not ignore the statement, but I needed to protect myself. I telephoned my news editor, read back my notes and explained that I had checked with Mankahlana to ensure I had not misquoted him. We ran his comments on the wires and, as expected, it was splashed all over the media the following day. To his credit, Mankahlana stood by his statement, despite the hue and cry it generated.

A huge dose of scepticism is essential. If you're going to believe everything you hear, then be prepared to be suckered and run the risk of losing credibility.

There is much that can be said about political reporting and each reporter's experience is different. I prefer the old school, where facts and the truth are still more important than a reporter's opinion. I still believe that starting out in political journalism does not mean that inexperienced reporters should become instant columnists, allowed to unleash their opinion on the public, simply because they have one. It's all about learning to walk before one can run. It's about starting at the bottom, getting the basics right and slowly building a reputation. It's about reporting the facts and only when one has earned one's stripes, getting the space to become a top columnist.

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CHAPTER FIVE

On the frontline

Peta Thornycroft

It's May Day, a glistening Autumn morning after a late and plentiful rainy season. In the Avondale shopping centre, north of central Harare, there is more traffic on this public holiday than most weekdays. All the supermarkets are open, and shelves are packed with more or less anything any grocery shopper outside of Sandton could want. The smell of freshly baked bread wafts over the potholed parking area jammed with the spectrum of Zimbabwe's fleet, the 1960 Morris Traveller and the 2004 Pajero, and the vegetable sellers meander between the vehicles.

I am offered a pawpaw for Z$18 000, and a packet of tomatoes for Z$10 000. It's the price of the pawpaw that gets me. They are less than half the price in my suburb. These are not the smart little papayas I see in Jo'burg. These are serious fruits, large, rough skinned, exotic smelling, filled with black pips. Less sweet, but tangier than their seedless First World cousins. The ATM has money, Z$500 000 maximum pull, and delight of delight, the garage has petrol and instant service, price marginally up from the previous week to Z$3 000 a litre.

In the IB, short for Italian Bakery, on the perimeter of the shopping centre, people are having double espressos, gossiping in the filtered morning sun, and the service is as slow as ever. Can this be reporting from a hot spot?

I had gone to the IB to meet someone who would be able to help with opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai's political diary, and it needed to be done face to face, as we all suspect, perhaps foolishly, that our telephones, landline and cell, are not private. And Morgan, as we all call him, is in some level of danger all the time.

I wanted to go to deep Matabeleland when Morgan would be in Lupane on the campaign trail ahead of the by-election just around the corner. It was an important date. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) had recently lost a by-election in its Harare stronghold, but Matabeleland is a different place altogether. There is still bad karma there from 20 years ago when then prime minister Robert Mugabe sent in his storm troopers who killed, tortured and tormented thousands. Lupane took the brunt of it. Tantalisingly, I learn as I prepare for the trip that a youth militia camp has been established a stone's throw from where 55 school children were slaughtered in 1983. The road is apparently terrible, and it is far from any mission or any other friendly place. I hear a report about a Zanu PF campaign meeting in Lupane addressed by a former top commander of Zanu PF's war-time forces. He promised a group, largely of women, that a vote for Zanu PF in the Lupane by-election would bring water from the Zambezi to their district.

What is it that scares us so much, I asked? The cells, the filth, the smell, itching from the lice, overcrowding?

An old woman apparently stood up to answer him. The people of dry Matabeleland have heard this promise for more than 20 years, she said. She asked whether any water dropping on Lupane would see their dead children grow again like grass. It would be a great quote, but is it true? Would I be able to find others who attended that meeting? We, the handful of foreign correspondents, hardly ever move out of Harare these days, especially to rural Matabeleland. It's a long way away, isolated, and most young people from many villages now live in South Africa, so it's desolate, deserted, and fuel down there is always a worry.

My contact at the IB told me 'the people' wanted the MDC to fight the by-election, despite the familiar hazards, dead people voting, stuffed ballot boxes, and so on. As we talked at the IB about the logistics of getting into the

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area, and who to contact down there, a couple of guys sat down at the table next to us. Instinctively, we changed the subject and talked about crops, gardening, the value of fertiliser over chicken manure. It remained second nature for both of us to change the subject. They were probably just a couple of lads with time to spare and money to blow on a toasted chicken sandwich. But maybe they weren't.

The afternoon before, three of us (foreign correspondents) had bumped into each other at another coffee shop. We had been pleased to see each other and had laughed and gossiped and exchanged notes. We moaned about how we were all going broke with the cost of living and the low priority of the Zimbabwe story against Iraq, the Middle East, Sudan, the US presidential election and the EU. We recalled that the story most of us had been able to flog in the last few weeks was cricket. And, briefly, the arrest of the finance minister and the alleged mercenaries.

Two of us have been refused entry to the special court in the Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison on the outskirts of Harare, for the remand hearings of the 'mercenaries', and the third said he wished 'someone would bloody well stop me'. He had had to get to Chikurubi by 8.15am for the security checks and hand in his cellphone, and was then only able to file to his regional head office in Johannesburg at the end of proceedings, eight hours later. It's a long time for a wireman to be out of contact with the world.

Each of us had our own bits of information, or were they rumours fuelled by paranoia? Our contacts told us that information minister Jonathan Moyo would try and 'do' the rest of us ahead of the parliamentary election that was to be held in ten months. For foreign currency, we heard. Does he think we make the kind of money he used to earn when he worked for the Ford Foundation in Kenya? We hear that he had forwarded nine names to the police. The surprise is that there had still been nine of us left to 'do'. The conversation made us glum. What is it that scares us so much, I asked? The cells, the filth, the smell, itching from the lice, overcrowding?

Yes, it is the physical discomfort that worries us. And now arrest has, in certain instances, become endless detention. Using handy security laws or the wide-ranging anti-corruption decree, detention can go on and on, bail as elusive as Mugabe's retirement. What none of us talks about is torture. We have all interviewed too many people in the last couple of years, in hospitals, in their homes, and seen the injuries. Silently we console ourselves that

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Do we laugh? Indeed we do. We laugh a lot, and we share a lot. We don't see one another as competition, because we are all trying to keep on trucking.

journalists won't be tortured... And, of course, what we block out is that former colleagues Ray Choto and Mark Chavanduka were terribly tortured by the military.

Mark has since died. Ray is overseas, and is not coming home until it's safe, and that's not now. We have reported on journalists from the now-banned *Daily News* who were injured during beatings from the police. Do we laugh? Indeed we do. We laugh a lot, and we share a lot. We don't see one another as competition, because we are all trying to keep on trucking.

We are an unusual, small group of journos working for the foreign media in Zimbabwe. Only the wire-service journalists were granted registration in terms of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy legislation, although all of us applied. We are all citizens, otherwise we could not continue to work here in terms of the law. Those of us without licences always carry receipts from the Media and Information Commission to prove that we applied.

We are all also worried about the country and its people. It's not just some foreign place. It has a place in our hearts beyond the story. This experience tells me that the practice of sending foreign correspondents on finite assignments is probably better for 'the story' than us long stayers who are inevitably more involved.

Among the handful of us are a couple of the best news writers in Africa, who have reported, photographed or filmed some of Africa's worst wars – Somalia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Rwanda, and so on. Before the most recent elections, we would talk a lot about the stories we wanted to do since campaigning had started. We knew that rural teachers, nurses, shopkeepers, were having to identify their favourite political party, sometimes in notebooks in staff rooms.

We heard that from people coming to town. But we needed it first-hand. We knew that, even if we could get out there, we would not have been able to name our interviewees, and may even have had to disguise the area we had visited.

As for getting pictures, forget it. We knew that the ruling Zanu PF had buttoned up, or buttoned down many districts in its strongholds, particularly in the three Mashonaland provinces. And we feared going out there, to the rural and peri-urban areas, especially out of cellphone range, which is about 20km outside each town.

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All main roads leading to the cities had police roadblocks, and the usually polite uniformed branch of the Zimbabwe Republic Police were on the look-out for journalists. So we had to have a good legend for why we were out there and where we were going. On minor public roads, especially in the old commercial farming areas that lead to densely populated communal farms and villages, many new landowners had erected gates or security posts. Even now, the network of informers is so huge that the arrival of strangers is known immediately.

We are all also worried about the country and its people. It's not just some foreign place. It has a place in our hearts beyond the story.

Frankly, we were scared of being caught in remote areas, out of cellphone range. The truth is we were not covering Zimbabwe properly because we could not venture out of the cities. Our networks of information had largely dried up as well. The commercial farmers and their workers who covered much of the country were an abundant source, particularly ahead of the 2002 presidential election. By the 2005 elections, they had mostly gone; the farm workers had melted into the throng of the unemployed, and we did not even know where they were, nor what was going on in much of the rural areas, where most people live.

We also hardly knew what the government and Zanu PF were up to, apart from what we picked up in the state-controlled media. Most of the stories we sent out were, in the classic sense, unbalanced, because they hardly ever had 'comment' from Zanu PF or the government. The wire services had stock phrases about land, which got tagged onto many of their reports as an effort to balance their copy. But none of us had access to ministers. We did try – every day, every story – to do what our training and experience compels us: get the other point of view.

Some of the most unusual quotes of my career come from this period of reporting Zimbabwe. The permanent secretary for information, George Charamba, is the man to whom I turn when ministers' cellphones are turned off, or when they hang up when they hear my voice. President Mugabe made a statement about landownership that the government would come down on those who had 'taken' more than one farm in the last four years. Agriculture minister Jo Made's phone was on voicemail as usual. His permanent secretary Norbert Masoka was not in his office at the Department of Agriculture, and his cellphone was off. So I asked George Charamba if the president's statement included everyone, including the Mugabe family. 'Tell Peta Thornycroft,' he

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said, talking to me on his cell, 'to take an AK47 and shoot them all.' That was the quote. It was published in *The Daily Telegraph*.

What on earth would the commuters on the 7.10am train from Guildford in the UK think about that? No idea, I don't even know where Guildford is, nor much about *The Daily Telegraph's* readers, but at least it made the foreign subs laugh.

The last time I called Charamba for a comment was when the government's Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA) moved in and kicked off thousands of people working on, or for, a huge vegetable export farm in the Manicaland Province in the east of Zimbabwe. The farm, Kondozi, was an oasis of organised agriculture, among hundreds of square kilometres of barren despair. Its personnel included war veterans and peasant farmers among its basket of producers.

I had been there eight weeks earlier, and to see people well fed, their children at school, signs of some prosperity filled my heart, heavy with the burden of so many stories of grief, with a small burst of happiness. ARDA, which Joe Made had driven to bankruptcy as director before he was appointed to his present ministry, took it over, lock, stock and barrel, including all the workers' houses, equipment, seed, chemicals.

In one weekend the livelihoods of about 8 000 people, and their families, and the neighbouring communal community were down the pan. And Zimbabwe would lose about R120 million a year in foreign currency from export of the beans, baby corn and red peppers.

How could I understand this? How could I explain to readers in Britain, or radio listeners in South Africa, any reason for the government's action… as it looked like a personal vendetta against majority shareholder Edwin Moyo, a former journalist, and his white partners, the De Klerk family?

ARDA has tens of thousands of unused hectares around the country, which it wastes, year after year. Kondozi was a fine, fine place, a unique African participant in fussy foreign supermarkets in the UK and Woolworths in South Africa. So I asked Charamba for a comment. 'So what are you worried about, that the British won't have enough beans in their supermarkets?' he said. I managed to hang up on him before he did it to me.

There have been so many farm stories, employers weeping, workers and their children packing pots and pans as they stared homelessness in the face, cattle sent to the abattoirs too early, crops abandoned mid-harvest, and dogs

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and horses shot. But Kondozi got to me like no other. Because in a way, hateful as it is to see people dispossessed, the eviction of white farmers and their workers, was, from a historical perspective, understandable, sort of.

Kondozi's closure was not. It was a unique experiment, the transfer of First-World know-how to peasants who were making it and becoming self-employed. Also Manicaland was the province of my youth and the mountains are comfortable old friends, like the sharp blue dazzle of those skies in the east fading to the horizon that is Mozambique.

I knew why the Kondozi tragedy happened, even though senior members of the government, including Joseph Msika, the deputy president, opposed it. Moyo, involved in the company for more than eight years, and Piet de Klerk, had a profile – whether warranted or not – of having supported the MDC. Perhaps the real shock of what became of Kondozi helped me to tell that story better than some, like the treason trial.

How could I understand this? How could I explain to readers in Britain, or radio listeners in South Africa, any reason for the government's action…

Telling the story of Morgan Tsvangirai's trial on treason charges, particularly in short bursts on radio, was too difficult. How could it be explained? I bet most people interested in reading or listening to reports on Zimbabwe didn't understand our reportage beyond the facts of who was on trial, and that there was a video tape in which the accused was said to have plotted Mugabe's assassination. Eventually I avoided doing the story, because I knew I sounded, or wrote reports that were, either partisan or mad. Only those inside the courtroom, or who had more space than most news reports allow, could have reported the case in its context, in particular the state's chief witness, Ari Ben Menashe.

Most of us had reported many, many trials but none of us had ever seen a witness like this. Yelling at defence advocate George Bizos, calling him a racist, saying he couldn't remember so many times the defence lawyers lost count of his memory lapses. Even now, recalling his evidence makes me agitated. The wire-service reporters who mostly went to court every day, and had continuity in reporting the story, say they too wonder whether their readers understood the trial.

It is not right when journalists make news. I found it impossible to avoid this after getting locked up briefly. Even now it is too embarrassing to relate some of the more hairy experiences. In a way, those moments are par for the

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course of what we do for a living. But also because whatever we, this small group of foreign correspondents, have been through, it was nothing compared to the local journalists, Zimbabweans like us, from *The Daily News* in particular, who are now so vanquished.

Was this reporting a conflict situation? It's not the sounds of war, only a couple of bombs and hardly any killing at all. The torture has been more than any of us ever expected and the flickerings of an attempt at a post-liberation democracy are all but stilled. And that's been hard, and for me at least, hot too.

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CHAPTER SIX

Excellent features

Franz Krüger

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Close your eyes for a moment and imagine the feature writer. They often dress funny, and their desks are full of little personal knick-knacks. They sit slightly apart from the mad whirl of the news room, and seem to come and go as they please. But their greatest privilege is time. Feature writers have time to look, and to think, and to compose, and even to revise, before their sparkling prose appears in the paper, taking up an impossible amount of space.

(Okay, you can open your eyes again.)

From across the great divide, hard-news reporters watch them with a curious mixture of contempt and envy. Contempt for the softness of their subjects ('Cellphones have changed our lives? Land reform is too slow? What kind of stories are those?'), envy of the privileges they seem to enjoy ('If they gave me so much time, I could also produce 1 200 words on AIDS orphans').

In truth, there's a mystique around feature writing that has done it much harm. It's seen as the preserve of a special breed, beyond the reach of ordinary

reporters. As a result, it has sometimes attracted people who see themselves as writers rather than reporters. And yet you can't be a features writer unless you're a very good reporter. But more of that later…

It's easiest to define features by working out what they are not. Hard news focuses on the immediate event; it tells us what has happened: somebody was elected, somebody else was murdered. Features are everything else.

René Cappon, a veteran editor of the Associated Press, says: 'The hard-news story marches briskly through the whats, whens, wheres, looking neither right nor left, packing in enough details to give readers a clear picture.' In his book *Writing for the Media in South Africa*, Francois Nel quotes Cappon, and then continues: 'In features, the immediacy of the event is secondary. The plain ladder of descending news values is replaced by human interest, mood, atmosphere, emotion, irony, humour.'

And in her book *Contemporary Editing*, Cecilia Friend writes: 'In the architecture of journalism, feature stories are the designer jobs. Like cathedrals and custom homes, features stand out from the humbler and more utilitarian story structures surrounding them.'

In some usages, features include columns, profiles, essays and much else – really everything that is not hard news. But there is a slightly narrower way of using the term. When most South African editors hear it, they will think of a piece that takes a step back from the day's news, and explores its subject in greater depth. Yes, the quality of the writing matters more, and yes, it is likely to be quite a bit longer than a hard-news story.

Features offer a broader canvas to the writer – and that's precisely why they sometimes go so badly wrong. Some of the stuff served up as features in many South African newspapers really don't deserve the name. There they squat like fat toads on the page, all big headline and pretentiousness. But, as you bravely work your way down into the copy, you find that it's just a shopping-list story. One source is quoted, then another, then another, with no attempt to organise the material coherently.

The first thing a successful feature needs is a clear point. A good journalist will have some sense of where he or she wants to go even before making the first phone call. Of course, it's important to be flexible enough to change focus in the light of research. By the way, 'government delivery' or 'AIDS orphans' don't make a focus. Those are just subjects; a focus needs to be much tighter.

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One way of developing clarity is to force yourself to write a focus statement: a short sentence that captures the essence of the story. Make sure it's in the active voice, preferably with some sense of cause and effect. The key element is the verb – without something happening, features can be awfully static.

This may seem fussy, but it has many advantages. A clear focus, whether formulated as a sentence or not, helps organise the research. It can be tested for its 'so what?' value, whether it's really worth doing. And you can use it to sell the story to the editor.

Let's listen in to a fictional exchange:

'You want to do a story about government delivery,' says the news editor. 'What about *government delivery?' (She's asking for a development, for something to be happening.)*

'Uhmm… I want to write about how poor people are disappointed by the slow pace of delivery,' the journalist stutters.

'Well, that's not really new, is it?' says the news editor, and turns towards the more immediate rewards of a court story.

A little while later, the journalist returns: 'That government delivery story. I'd like to write about how former homeland civil servants are holding back government delivery in a kind of passive resistance.'

The news editor shines the full warmth of her approval on the reporter: 'That I can see. Let's find some time later to talk about it.'

Now the news editor can see the story idea clearly, and it passes the 'so what?' test. A focus also helps you work out which are important sources, and which are not. And research, as I've already said, is crucial to the story.

Great features are written by people who know a lot about their subject. They can hold their own in an extensive dinner-table conversation on it; they can answer the questions of interested readers.

I sometimes talk about the 80:20 principle: you should have enough material so that you can throw 80 per cent of it away. This enables you to choose the best, and helps you write with a nuanced understanding of the subject. (So you think the ratio excessive? Okay, change it a bit. But the basic point remains: gather enough material to give yourself choices.)

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Let's consider for a moment the different kinds of material you may need:

- the facts, the figures – the hard stuff;
- analysis and commentary from the experts journalists love so dearly; and
- descriptive material, anecdotes, illustrations, personalities – the softer stuff.

Sometimes a feature needs more of one, sometimes less. It's worth giving a little thought to how hard, how descriptive or analytical the piece should be.

There's a tendency to think of description as fluff and embroidery. Subs are often guilty of taking their knife straight to the description, leaving 'the substance' untouched. Big mistake. Of course, the descriptive elements may be extraneous add-ons (and some types of feature can succeed with little or none). But in many well-crafted features, they supply essential information about mood, atmosphere – the texture of the story. Description is also substantive information.

And it can be very hard work to gather. It needs a good eye for detail, particularly for the things that will add real value. Sometimes, the detail that speaks will declare itself to you right there in the field. The top executive of a multinational breweries company tells you that his parents ran a shebeen; or you notice that the desk of the politician being investigated for corruption is covered with travel brochures for Dubai: if you don't immediately realise the potential of facts like these, you're in the wrong business.

The simple rule is: get as much detail as possible, and note it down.

Other details do not immediately speak so clearly, but are important nevertheless. The weather, the colour of a jersey or the brand of beer all help to make writing more concrete and specific. You won't know while you're in the field which details exactly your writing will need, but if you don't have the detail when you are writing, it's not often possible to go back and find it.

So the simple rule is: get as much detail as possible, and note it down. You may think you know the slogan on the unionist's T-shirt, but chances are you won't remember it exactly. And accuracy matters. If you say the child's dress was blue, be sure that it was.

Once you have enough material, it's time to plan.

There are few successful writers who simply plunge in with the first words and work their way to the end without having some sense of how they are going to get there. It's much more sensible to have a map.

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Marshal your material, making sure you have an overview of everything. This is the time to review the focus, too. Make sure it fits the material, and revise it if necessary. Then work out how best to fit everything together, to be able to lead readers logically and interestingly through the subject. I often think of a longer piece in terms of sections or 'chapters', as these make good building blocks for a rough plan.

Then, and only then, it's time to put finger to keyboard, and begin writing.

As with other kinds of journalism, the beginning matters a great deal. A very popular way of starting a feature is the delayed intro. The opening paints a picture, describes a snatch of action, sets up a small mystery or tells an anecdote. What it doesn't do is tell the reader immediately what the piece is going to be about.

It often introduces a person who will be affected by land reform, or cellphones, or whatever. This kind of start forms the basis for a widely used structure for features, sometimes called the diamond shape, or the Wall Street Journal form, after the US newspaper that has used it extensively.

The person introduced at the beginning helps to humanise the issue, to evoke the reader's empathy. Then the writer broadens out: the issue is identified in a paragraph (in American usage, this is sometimes called the 'nut graf'), and then the piece canvasses whatever issues need to be dealt with. The piece then often ends by returning to the person introduced at the start.

But what really matters is finding a structure that works for the subject and the material. There's only one test: does it sustain the reader's interest?

Let's look at an extract from a report by Karen Iley, of Reuters, that appeared in June 2004 under the headline, 'Angolan prosperity hinges on informal economy'.

> *Life is looking up for Aida Felicia, a market trader and young mother living in the central Angolan town of Huambo. Her small business selling fertiliser at the lively San Pedro market has been kick-started by a local credit scheme that allows her to buy in bulk at cheaper prices and take home more profit for herself and her family.*
>
> *'My life is certainly improving. In the past, I sold fertiliser on credit, so really I was selling on behalf of someone else. I had to give almost all the money back to the supplier and I was left with very little, sometimes nothing at all,' Felicia said.*

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Almost three decades of civil war left the oil-rich, southwest African country in tatters and many of its 13 million people in dire poverty. Two years after the war ended, the country is still struggling to rebuild its economy.

Oil accounts for 40 per cent of Angola's gross domestic product and makes up 80 per cent of government revenue, but it is the informal economy – market- and street-trade – that gives a job and income to more than two-thirds of the workforce.

And the piece continues with reportage on the Angolan informal economy, with occasional references to Felicia.

There are many other possible ways of structuring a feature. Some writers about writing have developed considerable ingenuity in giving them names: there's the 'champagne glass' (starts with the most important material, has little gems distributed throughout like sparkly bubbles, and finishes with a very powerful ending); or the 'hub-and-spokes' (one central element, with others arranged around it); or 'sketch and miniature' (telling a story twice – once in broad brushstrokes and once in detail).

Excellent features need precise focusing, thorough research, careful planning and intelligent writing.

These names help us think about different possibilities. But what really matters is finding a structure that works for the subject and the material. There's only one test: does it sustain the reader's interest?

Part of the reason so many journalists struggle with structure is that many typical journalistic forms go against the grain. The simplest and most ancient form of storytelling is to start at the beginning and work your way through to the end. Fairy tales, myths and cautionary tales told at fires around the world take this form.

It's been rediscovered as 'narrative journalism'. The winning entry in the feature category of the 2003 Mondi Paper Newspaper Awards was a three-part series entitled 'A fall of sparrows'. The series, also named South African Story of the Year, saw *The Star's* Nalisha Kalideen trace the lives of two women with AIDS as their illness took hold and they were forced to move into an AIDS hospice. Kalideen later wrote about the series: 'These were two remarkable women. Their greatest triumphs were not in a grand act of heroism but in the simple courage they needed to live their seemingly ordinary lives.'

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Carefully observed and beautifully written, the series used narrative techniques to accompany the two women towards the inevitable end. It included flashbacks to deal with their earlier lives, dialogue and scenes. Its underlying logic simply followed the passage of time.

Radio and television can provide the breaking news, forcing newspapers to provide additional value.

Whichever structure you choose, your endings matter almost as much as your beginnings. The days of the inverted pyramid, of stories that simply fizzle out at the end, are over. Good writing encourages readers to stay with the story right until the end. It knows when the story is done, and concludes on a high note.

Don Pinnock, deputy editor of *Getaway* magazine, is worth quoting: 'A magazine story can be said to need a tooth-filled head of subtle and alluring beauty, a body as balanced as a butterfly and a tail of a stegosaurus: hard-hitting with sharp points at the end.'

The problem with endings is that they are often contrived. TV reporters struggle with this problem, too: truly, the next one who finishes a story saying 'Time will tell whether…' something or other, should be slowly strangled with his or her microphone cable.

Similar wisdom finds its way onto the end of feature stories. But there are better ways. In her book *Basic Journalism*, Gwen Ansell suggests a few possibilities. Good endings can:

- tie up loose ends;
- summarise – but should not editorialise;
- cast forward to the next story;
- emphasise the context; and
- be a 'kicker' – something new that offers a twist, or food for thought.

If the story began by introducing an individual, returning to that person can work very well. If he or she can provide a quote that summarises the story or looks forward, it can provide a very elegant and satisfying ending. The circle is complete.

Excellent features need precise focusing, thorough research, careful planning and intelligent writing. They really do take time. The strange people who inhabit the features department may seem fluffy and vague, but if they're doing their jobs properly, they are doing very hard-edged work. All those long deadlines are not simply indulgence.

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But here's the best part: all of these techniques work for hard news writing, too. In fact, the old divisions between features and hard news are softening, and the old, faithful inverted pyramid has fallen seriously from favour on the news pages, too. Radio and television can provide the breaking news, forcing newspapers to provide additional value. As a result, editors increasingly want flair, description and depth in the front of the paper, too.

So even if you're still stuck in the courts, you can begin collecting personal knick-knacks for your desk, too.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Travel writing

Carol Lazar

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I lay in the bath starkers. Well, that is usually how one takes a bath. Beside me, on a stool, sat a gas mask and a cylinder containing a poison-gas antidote.

The date? 15 January 1991.

The place? A hotel in Tel Aviv, Israel.

The phone rang. I leapt from the bath and grabbed the receiver. 'Lazar here,' I said briskly. There was silence.

'Hello, hello, hello,' I shouted and then felt hot air blasting from the receiver. This was it. Saddam Hussein had released his poison gas. I had seconds to live. I groped for the gas mask and placed it on my face, at the same time positioning the large injection cylinder against my leg. Then, above the sound of my frantic fumbling, I heard a shrill ring. Dammit, why is the phone still ringing when I've already answered it, I thought to myself.

Good lord, I'd mistaken the bathroom hairdryer for the telephone receiver. I was yelling into the hairdryer, hence the hot air. Thank heavens there was only a gas mask to witness my embarrassment. I giggled as, sans the mask, I climbed

back into the bath. Next morning, on 16 June, the first Gulf War began with Desert Storm, and on 17 January, Iraq launched scud missiles on Tel Aviv and Haifa. At the time, I was part of a small group of travel writers on a press trip to Israel. Naturally, all tourism articles were abandoned and instead we filed back hard news.

Yes, travel writing certainly has its moments.

What is a travel writer?

Above all, a good travel writer is somebody who writes like a dream. So, what makes a good travel writer? Take a news reporter, a political analyst, a passionate storyteller, a humorist and an observant feature writer, mix them together and, possibly, you'll come up with a great travel writer.

Highly respected travel writer Paul Theroux offers a definition of travel writing when he says that for writers, travel isn't about vacations, about the flavours and scents of a café or restaurant. It is about the total experience.

Another fine writer, Stephen Leacock, wrote his classic *Sun Sketches of a Little Town* in 1912. Humorous and descriptive, it is one of the most definitive travel books on *platteland* America ever written. *On the Road*, written as a novel by French-Canadian writer Jack Kerouac, evocatively describes his cross-America trips and it's a goose-pimple read.

In a career spanning over 30 years, BBC world affairs editor John Simpson has covered virtually every corner of the world. His many books are primarily political commentaries yet they offer rare insights into global travel. Neither Leacock, Kerouac nor Simpson are classified as travel writers. Top travel writer Bill Bryson whose books are known for their hilarious and wickedly humorous irreverence, worked for *The Times* and *The Independent* for many years. To supplement his income, he wrote travel articles… the rest is history. But – and it's a big but – all these authors have one thing in common. They can really write.

A travel writer, like every journalist, needs to develop eclectic interests. Current affairs, politics, archaeology, history, geography – these are all topics that deserve further exploration by aspiring travel writers.

It goes without saying that to be a travel writer, you should have a passion for travel – or you should be determined to acquire this passion. For anyone

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interested in travel, travel writing might be considered the ideal profession. The upside is that if you are successful and become established, you will have the opportunity to travel and be paid for doing so. The downside is that because the marketplace is filled with would-be travel writers, travel opportunities are limited, as are travel publications. You will not find it easy, especially when you are starting out, to get your travel articles published. This, of course, applies to all fields of journalism.

The idea of becoming a travel writer is attractive. After all, covering an unusual story in an enticing location such as a desert in Namibia, a jungle in Malaysia, a mountain top in Chile or the Everglades in the USA, beats sweating it out in an office with a news editor peering over your shoulder shouting about deadlines. But remember, exploring a *souk* in Morocco, going on a camel safari through the Sahara, sleeping with head-hunters in Borneo or riding from Moscow to Beijing on the TransSiberian Express are travel experiences that come around once in a lifetime, if at all.

Then again, a determined would-be travel writer will make things happen. For example, an aspiring travel writer will travel to Alaska to work in a fish-canning factory and earn good money. With that money, touring Alaska becomes possible, which in turn creates great copy for future travel articles.

Alternatively, adventurous souls will explore their home turf, winkling out unusual guesthouses like the one with rooms built in a tree, or the B&B that allows horses to sleep with their owners. Everyone will want to read about these offbeat and distinctly different establishments.

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What is travel writing?

Take the element of adventure, the acquisition of knowledge, the exploration of your own as well as other exotic lands and cultures, add to that the excitement of the unexpected, and you get an idea of the essence of travel writing. True, a lot of travel writing is service journalism – writing about the cost of air, train and bus fares, the easiest and cheapest way to get from Cape Town to Kumchatka, how to get good value for money, how to extend travel budgets and see more for less.

But talented travel writers will stimulate their readers' wanderlust. Good writers will inspire readers (or listeners or viewers) to pack their bags and set

off on their own travels. And, if that is not possible, they will take their readers on a literary journey, introducing them to different places and people, describing the tastes of exotic foods and unusual customs, observing, then relating things humorous and strange. Above all, good travel writers provide a good read.

Ethics

In journalism, ethics, integrity, honesty and transparency are paramount. Unfortunately, travel is one of the fields of journalism open to exploitation but, because there are so many different kinds of travel writer (or travel journalist), it is difficult to prescribe uniform standards. There are different rules applicable, for instance, between journalists who work for a newspaper and freelance writers. In fact, each media company operates in a different way and I can really only write with authority about my own newspaper group.

Our staff journalists are not allowed to solicit any kind of travel trip under any circumstance whatsoever. Our journalists are not allowed to ask airlines for free tickets or discounted tickets or hotels for accommodation. They are not allowed to approach tourist authorities for free trips. The newspapers of our group receive invitations through senior editors and a journalist is then assigned to the story.

A barter agreement is a written agreement that a journalist or publication is often asked to sign, stating that in return for a travel trip, the journalist (or publication) undertakes to provide copy about the destination, mention of the hosts involved, and so on. We do not sign barter agreements. In other words, we retain our right to write independently about a destination, travel experience, resort, hotel, and so forth. However, within the group, we have a code of ethics for in-house journalists accepting travel assignments. Included in the code are two important rules. Journalists are expected to participate in all activities that have been arranged for them while on their travel assignment and they have to produce at least one article within two weeks of return from the trip. If journalists travel under these circumstances, it will be stated somewhere in the articles that journalists have been hosted. It will also mention by whom.

My understanding is that most independent newspaper, broadcasting or television companies operate in this way. As a journalist, the onus is on you to know what is expected of you. Our newspapers' editorial travel sections

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operate independently of advertisers. This enables our writers to report independently on a travel destination without being beholden to advertisers. This, we believe, gives our travel writers integrity with our readers.

In journalism, ethics, integrity, honesty and transparency are paramount. Unfortunately, travel is one of the fields of journalism open to exploitation…

With freelancers, the situation differs. In South Africa, as elsewhere, freelance travel writers earn their living by the number of travel articles they get published. In South Africa, freelance travel writing is, on the whole, badly paid and most freelancers do not have the financial means to travel independently.

Freelancers, therefore, have to make their own arrangements as best as they can. This might mean requesting a free or subsidised ticket from an airline. It might mean asking a hotel group to organise accommodation, asking tour operators to arrange educational tours. In return, freelancers undertake to write articles and have them published in several publications. Well-known freelancers whose work is used on a regular basis make a living. For those who are starting out, being a freelance writer in South Africa, in any field, is daunting and many fall by the wayside.

Realpolitik

Travel sections in mainstream newspapers and magazines in Britain, the United States, Australia and several Middle and Far East countries are an integral and important part of the publication. Adequate financial budgets are planned, which enable in-house journalists to travel to different destinations, locally and abroad. In other words, a newspaper or magazine funds its writers. If journalists are sent on a domestic or overseas travel assignment, the publication foots the bill. In this way, total editorial independence is achieved.

In South Africa, small markets and financial constraints mean that most newspapers and magazines have limited financial resources and, in the field of travel, journalists are rarely sent off on investigative trips paid for by their publication. Every publication does, however, receive travel invitations. In South Africa, several editors or senior journalists describe such invitations as ‘freebies’. Actually, the term ‘freebie’ makes me spit because it is inaccurate, demeaning and detrimental to journalists, travel writing and tourism as a whole. By definition, it immediately assumes that a writer covering a travel destination is ‘going on a free holiday’. This is unacceptable.

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Worldwide, the positive impact of tourism on the domestic economy is undisputed – more so, in fact, in so-called developing countries (such as South Africa). For any economy, the benefits of foreign tourism are multilayered. Increased visitors means more hotels, more beds, more cars required, more associated services and hence more jobs – overall a positive impact on aggregate demand in the economy. The impact of increased tourism expenditure is unambiguously a growth stimulus. But in the developing world, tourism also brings in foreign exchange, which so often the case, is in short supply. In South Africa, with the current weakness of the dollar, this is not a major issue at present, but it has been in the past (such as in 1996/7/8). A stable and solid tourism sector can often make a more significant contribution to GDP than, for instance, commodities, the latter being vulnerable to international trends. Accordingly, tourism is taken extremely seriously by both government and the private sector.

So there is no question that tourism should be taken seriously by the editors of newspapers. Therefore, when a journalist is invited on a travel assignment, he or she is not taking a 'freebie'. That reporter is not going on a 'free holiday'. A journalist working on a travel assignment is doing a job. The journalist should be professional, report accurately and produce an article. Tourism participants are serious. They deserve to be taken seriously. Being taken seriously does not mean sending a reporter on a travel assignment because he or she deserves a 'freebie'. It does not mean giving a reporter a travel trip as a reward for work done. This is insulting to the tourism industry, it is insulting to journalists.

If newspapers, magazines, TV or radio companies want to reward their employees for good work by providing them with free holidays, then they should purchase the vacations themselves. In our present newspaper culture, editors often jump at the opportunity to send their junior reporters on a travel trip because they feel the experience will be educative. Travel is educative but if members of staff need educative travel experiences, these should be paid for by the publication concerned. To expect the travel industry to pay for the education of media employees is immoral.

The other side of the coin is that editorial coverage provided by the media for a travel product is worth its weight in gold. That coverage will stimulate interest, create travel excitement and generate income. The relationship between the media and the travel industry must, at all times, be professional.

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How to become a travel writer

It seems everyone wants to write travel. Each week, our newspaper receives many unsolicited articles from enthusiastic travellers who are aching to share their experiences. Occasionally, we receive a gem – an evocative, perceptive, descriptive, intriguing and well-written article – but more often than not, the offerings read like diary entries or travel brochures. They are bland, tedious and boring.

So, what makes a good travel article?

Perhaps in defining this, I'll start with what, in my opinion, does not make a good piece of travel writing. Over-writing – the use of facile adjectives, clichés, using statistics in a dry, uninteresting way, being repetitive, inaccurate about facts – these are things to be avoided. Some words, such as 'nice' and 'beautiful', should be forever banned while others such as 'awe-inspiring' or 'awesome', 'breathtaking', 'magnificent' and 'picturesque' should be used with iron-clad restraint.

If you want to write travel, then do it. You don't have to travel a long way to find a topic that can make an interesting travel feature. Look around and you will see that there is plenty happening on your doorstep. You could write about the different markets in your town, the offbeat clubs, the strange people in the area and the funny things they say, unusual places to shop, eat or relax.

A journalist working on a travel assignment is doing a job. The journalist should be professional, report accurately and produce an article.

If you want to write for a particular publication, get hold of past copies and read them thoroughly beforehand so that you understand the style of writing that will be expected of you. If you are given a travel assignment, it is essential to do some homework about your destination before you depart. Thanks heavens for the Internet. Get onto the Net and look for unusual stories, happenings, places – anything out of the ordinary that your potential readers will find interesting.

I always do this before I travel anywhere and, over the years, in different countries, I have discovered a secret shrine to noses, a shop selling the oldest comics in the world, a temple with dancing snakes and a boutique specialising in silk underwear for men.

An intrepid travel writer needs wide-open eyes, ears that hear everything, a mouth that keeps smiling and a stomach with a strong lining. Sleep is something

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that you do when you get back home. Always take notes and check out the spelling of everything as you cannot rely on your memory, especially if it is in a constant state of travel euphoria.

If you are part of a guided tour, slope off and try to spend time on your own wandering around. Equally important is the need to speak to locals. Even in countries where foreign languages are spoken, you will invariably find somebody who can speak a little English. If you don't communicate with the locals, you will just have a tourist's superficial impression of the place you are visiting. If you're visiting for a short while, that is what you may have anyway, but at least aim for a touch of reality.

An intrepid travel writer needs wide-open eyes, ears that hear everything, a mouth that keeps smiling and a stomach with a strong lining. Sleep is something that you do when you get back home.

Scenery, new cities, countries and experiences are fascinating but it is people who make a story come alive. If you can find the time, take public transport and do a little exploring. It's also worthwhile going into a local supermaket or shop to check out prices to see how they compare. Learn to take your own pictures and you will be that much more versatile. Finally, travel around South Africa and write articles about your experiences. Backpacking is affordable and a fun way to get around. A bus service geared to backpackers networks the country and youth and backpacker hostels have mushroomed all over the place.

Wherever you are, record your adventures because one day, who knows, you'll write a great travel article…

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Sports reporting

Rodney Hartman

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Welcome to the impact zone. It is here, in the sports section, that you will expose yourself to the most rigorous examination by your readership. Given people's passion for sport, and their forthright and often biased opinions, you are now entering a conflict sector. Dare not get the goal-scorer wrong or misrepresent the career statistics of a favourite cricketer; the backlash will sting you.

Even if your facts are beyond reproach, you will still encounter opposition from those who contest your analysis and conclusions; and there will be times when you will be blamed for the headline that the subeditor has slapped on your story. Truth is that sports fans – and fanatical is what they are – believe that they have a personal stake, a form of ownership, in the game. When your writing challenges their views, opinions and tactical appreciation, they will let you know. Prepare to be maligned.

It gets worse. Many of the players you are describing are sensitive souls. Be sure you can justify your criticism of their performance; they will take you on. I once suggested that a fielder was 'dozing on the boundary' when

he dropped a vital catch. It was simply a figure of speech. The cricketer in question came to the press box the next day and publicly castigated me. He protested that he never fell asleep on the cricket field. We knew that.

Don't buckle, but be absolutely sure of your assessments and observations. It is good to gain a reputation as a sports writer of provocative opinion, but beware of becoming marked down as a cowboy who shoots from the hip. If you feel the need to criticise, do so constructively. Do not be tempted to get personal; it demeans you more than the object of your contempt.

We should all seek respect, and you will earn it if your views are consistent and honest and based on sound principle; and, importantly, that you stand by them. Do not be deterred if your opinion is unpopular or out of sync with a belligerent fan, official or player. Stick to your guns.

Our objectivity must remain sacrosanct; and one of its greatest foes is the temptation to make the player your friend. Name-dropping around the lunch table might impress your pals but, if you really *do* socialise with top players, how will you approach that critical moment in your match report when you know you should criticise one of them for a fatal error? Also, some of the best news reports about players' behaviour off the field are never filed – because the sports writers are themselves involved in the shenanigans. I confess that I make these points through lessons hard learned. I, too, fell into the traps of locker-room camaraderie – it is quite compelling, after all, to go on the town with a bunch of superstars, but there comes a time when you have to ask yourself some hard questions about who and what you really represent and what kind of image you need to project. My conclusion is that there is something decidedly infamous about cavorting with the famous when you have absolutely no business being there. The only way to achieve some form of personal fame is to gain the respect of your readers, peers and players through independence, integrity and reliability.

On the sports pages, opinions are truly earned. If you give the impression that you are a know-all, you will soon know all about it. Remember, it takes about ten years to become an overnight success.

Simplicity must be your friend. Some people write better than others but you won't become one of them if you think the trick is to use big words. The English language is a treasure chest and its usage is best mastered by reading good material. This does not mean looking for big words no one understands

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and then finding ways of inserting them into your copy. Read Ernest Hemingway. If you can find it, his book entitled *Byline*, a collection of his journalism, is first prize. He was rather inclined to minimise the value of his work as a reporter but his journalism, which he practised over four decades and reflected a love of sport, was the raw material from which he developed his distinctive literary creations that won him the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Readers of the sports pages like their writers to keep it simple and true. It is here that you are closer to the mind of your reader than any other section of the newspaper. Both the reporter and the reader are either failed sports stars or 'out there' playing their own little game, intimately involved in every significant phase of play. You are together in this and you, as the writer, have the privilege of putting it into the public domain. Like the great players you are reporting, you must be willing and able to go the extra mile. Sports writing is littered with stragglers. You must decide if you are content with being one of them.

On the sports pages, opinions are truly earned. If you give the impression that you are a know-all, you will soon know all about it.

We all have our favourite sports writers, but how many of us aspire to become one? That is the challenge of the sports writer; that he or she becomes good enough to be considered prescribed reading. 'Good enough' is a high hurdle, but 'excellent' is where we should aim.

During the years that I spent working as a correspondent in Fleet Street I absorbed some valuable lessons by following some of the best exponents of the art of sports writing. One is not coy about using the word 'art' because it is the kind of creative journalism that can be good enough to be contained between the hard covers of a book. Try this one for size:

> *As a concession to the magnitude of his next fight, which happens to be against Muhammad Ali for the world heavyweight title, Mr Charles 'Chuck' Wepner has made a radical revision to his lifestyle. He has switched from vodka to beer. As he tilted the bottle with his right hand, Chuck Wepner was using his left to pilot his primrose-yellow Cadillac down the New Jersey Turnpike at just over 70mph. We shot a couple of traffic lights on very late orange, but my whimpers of anxiety were drowned by a multi-decibel track on Mr Wepner's auto stereo…*

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The author of that colourful prose is one of my favourites, Ian Wooldridge of the *Daily Mail*, who became so good that the word on the street was that he was able to command a bigger salary than his editor, provided he did not aspire to mahogany row but continued to write the best sports column in town. Wooldridge operated by the axiom that he was perfectly happy to be paid for doing something that he would have done anyway had he been born rich.

Want some more? Okay:

> *A cold white mist was already rolling up the valley like the wrath of God when Vasili Korotaev shook off four Welshmen as though they'd never been born and torpedoed over the line just inside the left corner flag.*
>
> *Korotaev, a 6 foot 7 inch atheist from Moscow, is claimed by his coach to be a watchmaker, which strikes you as odd since he is only 22 and has fingers like frankfurters. Anyway, his try made the score 10–0 to Slava Moscow and my Welsh neighbour, in the vibrant tones of a lay-preacher interpreting the Book of Revelations, announced: 'It's all over.'*

Tell me you wouldn't buy the paper to read him again tomorrow.

Sport quickens the pulse in most of us and, dare I say, so should sports writing. As sports writers, our passion for both should be more than we would readily confess. I know you have just laced on your boots for the World Cup final; and that later in your daydream you will hit a volley into the top corner of the net to clinch the winning goal. Believe me, I do understand; all of us are superstars at heart who would love nothing more than to represent our club or country in the great arenas and in the showpiece games of the world. Sports writing, you see, is merely the sublimation of these unfulfilled dreams and impulses. But we are luckier than the player or the manager or coach; we have 20–20 vision and, unlike them, we can practise the exact science of hindsight with a deft little rewrite or a dip into the thesaurus. Just don't become too much of a smart-ass; rather concentrate on the facts and the telling, descriptive phrase.

The true art of sports writing is developing your own distinctive style. Try a touch of terse irony but beware of sarcasm; capture the images of sport's evocative body language and turn this into imagery; work, as Hemingway did, on producing beautiful metaphor and simile but if you think that's as easy as

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pie, you will plunge headlong into the cliché trap. Sports writing is awash with clichés so you should make a conscious effort to avoid the 'siege-gun boots', the 'gangling strikers', the 'niggling injuries', the 'tough as teak' boxers, the ball travelling 'like a tracer bullet' and the 'string bean athlete'. Remember, clichés were once fresh and original gems. Find new ones. Open your eyes, open your mind and this way you will discover the essence of your own unique style.

Which brings me to my ten basic commandments in the theory of good sports writing:

- Know your sport.
- Don't ever think you know it well enough.
- Learn through engaging others who know.
- Read, read, read.
- Don't be too opinionated at the outset.
- Ensure that your opinion is backed by solid argument.
- Do your homework.
- Communicate.
- Be inspired.
- Read some more.

We will return to some of these a little later, but at the outset it is important to know that sports writing adheres to the basic rules of news reporting and to the ethics of our trade: accuracy, clarity and fairness. Where it differs is that it requires expert analysis and fearless opinion of the performance of heroes who are considered untouchable. Also, in this age of wall-to-wall televised sport, it is no longer enough to answer the question 'what happened?' but to answer the more vexing 'what does it mean?' Remember, most of your readers have already got their 'match report' through watching the telecast. When they open their paper the next day, they expect you to fill in the detail they could not see or did not know. There is a challenge here for a degree of gravitas that, alas, is not always well met by its practitioners.

As to how these practitioners represent themselves, since when do we go to work in a scruffy T-shirt, shorts and sandals? At a televised media conference from the boardroom of the SA Rugby Football Union offices in Cape Town, the smart new president had some important things to impart. Sitting in the front row facing him was a senior rugby writer dressed like a beach bum. It was an effrontery. Here's a simple truth: you are not in the press box or at the media conference because of you. You are there representing your news

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organisation and your fraternity. You're its shop window. Sports writers tell me that their editors, let alone the public, do not take them seriously enough. They believe they deserve more respect. My advice is that it is hard to take seriously anyone who walks into your office looking like a yobbo and at times behaving like one.

Another thing: you are not famous because you happen to interview famous people. You only get to meet them because you are representing a news organisation. If you don't believe me, go to Ellis Park without a media pass and tell the gateman you need to get into the press box because you are the well-known writer. It's a real ego-deflator to realise that he has never heard of you.

Also, please kick the 'freebie' habit. If you have to take the T-shirts, please do not wear them to work. If your partner doesn't object, use them as pyjamas. Sponsors are good for sport, but you don't have to be their billboard. Instead, be an advertisement for excellence in sports writing. Excellence and integrity is what we should always strive for. The latter quality is particularly important amid the increasing commercialisation of sport where balance must be achieved in acknowledging the role of the growing band of sponsors. Professional sport in the 21st century is a very expensive commodity and, without sponsors, we probably would not have a match to cover. These companies deserve their due but we should not be persuaded to overdo it. A national editors' agreement, which I hope still applies, allowed for one mention of the event sponsor in any one story. There is no reason one can find to mention the sponsors of teams or venues. Like the players, the sponsors deserve your respect if not your largesse.

As for those ten commandments, there is one that you should live by:

Communicate. It is common cause that, as members of the communications industry, we communicate rather poorly. Communication comes in different forms, but your first priority is to establish your 'comms' with the office. A story is worthless until it gets into the paper and a report built on sound facts and fine prose isn't worth a cent if you cannot transmit it. If you are covering a game against the clock, you have little or no comfort zone. In the age of floodlit sport, the risks of disaster with deadline filing are very high. You must always have a fallback position.

Sports writers who pitch up five minutes before kickoff and presume that the telephone is working are toying with disaster. Get there early (if you can,

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pop in the day before) and check your landline. I emphasise 'landline' because you should not rely on your cellphone. In a packed venue with high cellular activity in and around the stadium you might find the network jammed. Also carry a spare landline instrument in your bag.

If you are filing via laptop, send a test message to your office before the start. Send at least one more later to ensure that your connection is still intact. Never leave home without a spare stiffy disc in your bag. If your remote filing system crashes, you can still copy your story onto disc and lean on a colleague to file it via his or her laptop.

Always do some writing during breaks in play and at halftime or intervals. If your deadline is very tight, it is advisable to file a chunk of body copy in advance. It stills the nerves to know that your editor already has something from you 'in the can'. You can revise it later if necessary.

It is also reassuring to have a good copy typist in the office to take a quick dictate if your laptop hits a snag.

A story is worthless until it gets into the paper and a report built on sound facts and fine prose isn't worth a cent if you cannot transmit it.

You will gather from all the above that stress levels generally run quite high in the press box. Be organised, don't panic.

At all times communicate your intentions to key people. Should you see a news story developing around the event, contact your office immediately. It is always good to have the right photograph to illustrate or complement your story. Therefore, devise some system of communication with your photographer on the pitch. Again, do not rely entirely on your cellphone. If you have decided to angle your story on a certain player, let your photographer know what you want. On the subject of pics, study the players carefully so that you can easily identify them for captioning purposes. In a pile-up of rugby players, a telltale armband or kneeguard can provide the vital clue.

There are three other commandments that you might wish to consider for 'getting into the zone' ahead of the assignment:

Do your *homework* assiduously the day before the game or the interview. Find out all you can about the event or your subject. Before the game, discover which players are nearing milestones on which you may have to report and how you will do so, check out the head-to-head statistics of the contestants, familiarise yourself with the kind of eventualities that may arise

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If your deadline is very tight, it is advisable to file a chunk of body copy in advance. It stills the nerves to know that your editor already has something…

and how these will impact on the way you construct your piece. Think of the kind of imagery that might enliven your report. Close your eyes and visualise the drama that is about to unfold.

Read, read, read is what makes good writers better; but there is more to it than that. I am inspired by exceptional sports writing, so that is all I read the night before a big game. I am not trying to copy these fine wordsmiths but rather remind myself of the heights that can be scaled. Thus…

Be inspired. It's the equivalent of the team talk, the inspirational words from the coach as you lace up your boots. In the same way as players get 'pumped up' or mentally attuned, sports writers who want to triumph on the day can take their own form of inspiration from the great practitioners of their craft, the favourites they wish to become.

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CHAPTER NINE

The art of the interview

John Perlman

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I was new at the job, a regular eager beaver, but no amount of enthusiasm could alter the harsh fact that the person I was talking to was hellbent on limiting his answers to two words. Nothing verbose like four words, or six. Just two.

So what made you take up snooker as a career, I asked, smile fixed, pen poised. 'Liked it.' And who taught you the game? 'Friend's dad.' And when did you realise you might be good enough to match the world's best? 'Can't say.'

Can't say, myself, whether it was irritation or inspiration, but I then said this to Silvino Francisco, South Africa's top snooker player, ranked in the world's top ten: 'I must say, snooker doesn't look like a very demanding game. Half of the time you are sitting down, watching the other guy play.' And suddenly the interview opened up, wide.

'Do you know what it feels like to sit there?' he asked, suddenly interested, definitely irritated. 'If you're 1–0 down in a soccer match you run like hell to get a goal back. If you make one mistake in snooker you are gone. You sit there with plenty of time to think about that mistake, with between 16 and 20

million people watching you on TV, while the guy is murdering you. And there's nothing you can do about it. That's what's criminal about this game.'

It was a fascinating insight and Francisco talked and talked. I couldn't get him to stop. He followed me to my car and talked some more, and I wisely decided not to wind down my car window as I made my escape. And even though the interview happened 17 years ago, the way it turned around so suddenly still makes me chuckle.

Interviews are to journalists what live gigs are to rock stars. 'How would you know?', you might ask, if you were interviewing me. 'Have you ever been a rock star?' Nope, sadly. And it's ironic too that I struggle to describe how it feels when that creative space suddenly opens up, when a question well and truly hits the mark. After all, one of the most elusive things we pursue in interviews is an answer to precisely that question: 'So, how does it feel?' All I can say is that it feels good, great, exhilarating. 'Like it,' as my mate Silvino would say.

There's no magic formula to interviewing – you can kiss some frogs all you like, throw in some roses and background jazz, and they won't come up princely. But some things work better than others. Let's begin at the beginning.

Sharpening your pencil, clearing your head

I hate stating the obvious, but I'll get over it – here it is. You must do some research before you meet your subject. Don't see it as homework. See it as foreplay, peanuts before beer – pick your own metaphor. Find out about the place you're going to, the person to whom you're planning to talk. Read through what's been written already, but don't stop there. Speak to people they know, to colleagues who might have had a go at cracking the same interview.

You see, there are two people involved in an interview and it is very easy to forget that one of them is you. Never mind the receptiveness of the subject, how open is *your* mind to something surprising and new? If you're stuck in the familiar, familiar and tired is what you'll get back. As with any exercise, it helps to stretch before you begin.

For a start, learn to embrace doubt as your dearest friend – not just in interviewing, but in everything you do as a journalist. Of course you'll approach every interview expecting people to be this way or that – but don't be thrown when they're not. This is when things get interesting. Everybody

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loves the award-winning actress, but that doesn't necessarily mean she's nice. Don't confuse celebrity with substance, hype with how things really are.

The key to all this is recognising that your subject is really just someone like you. Just as the word 'journalist' defines what you do and not who you are, the same is true of everyone you interview. So learn to regard the people you interview in a rounded way. Politicians and poets they may be, but they're fathers and mothers and football fans too.

This approach makes interviewing important people much more interesting, although you need to judge just when and how you move away from the central reason for your being there, to something more personal. The TV journalist who began an interview with the president by asking Thabo Mbeki what was in his CD collection soon realised that he wasn't in the mood for small talk. But when I found myself twelfth in line to interview the newly appointed head of the Defence Force, I found a by-then weary General Siphiwe Nyanda was delighted to talk about a very insightful story he had written for *Mayibuye*, analysing what was wrong with South African soccer. Did I mention the importance of research?

There are two people involved in an interview and it is very easy to forget that one of them is you. Never mind the receptiveness of the subject, how open is your mind to something surprising and new?

The reward for taking this rounded approach with the well-known is rich and colourful material for whatever you write or broadcast. But it's even more important when applied to interviews with ordinary people – there this approach has a strongly ethical imperative. During the violence that preceded the 1994 elections, most of us failed miserably to respect this imperative. If people living in township houses were attacked, they were placed in body bags marked African National Congress. If a hostel dweller was hacked to death, he was from the Inkatha Freedom Party.

As we stacked and counted the body bags, we failed to mark the passing and loss of real lives – an elderly man who loved ballroom dancing, a young girl who dreamed of opening her own hair salon. I remember, in 1994, talking to the widow of a man killed by a right-winger's bomb in Krugersdorp. He was not a political man, she said. Just an ordinary somebody looking forward to the election and the birth of their first child, just ten days away. Had you chosen a name, I asked. 'Nkululeko,' she said. Freedom.

Simple question, heart-rending reply, and yet we all too often fail to ask

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When you have the real privilege of meeting people face to face, especially in personal space, remember: look and listen, smell and snoop. There is graffiti on the walls and music playing in the background…

such questions of those crushed by today's inexorable forces – cut down in road accidents, impoverished by collapsed pyramid schemes, drained and dessicated by HIV/Aids. When preparing to talk about a life, whether it's one in full bloom or one cut tragically short, think of a question or two that might evoke the humanity of that life, in all its complexity and fullness and subtleties. You will always be rewarded.

A final stretch... When preparing for an interview, keep reminding yourself that good journalists are respected but not necessarily liked. Both would be nice but the one has no link to the other, and respect lasts longer. Of course there are people we admire, ideals we share. But if you find yourself interviewing someone you think highly of, do them a real favour – ask them the questions uppermost in the minds of their fiercest critics.

One of my good friends used to work high up in professional cricket. One morning on AM Live, I pushed him hard on race and quotas and merit, and an all-too-familiar row over black players that was going on at the time. Afterwards we spoke on the phone: 'What the hell was that?' he asked, chuckling because he probably knew. 'Would you rather watch Jacques Kallis make 250 against Zimbabwe, or 102 against Australia?' I replied. It was a well-played 102, by the way, and a lot of people called him to say so.

Listen with your eyes

Enough preparation – let's get into the room with our subject. When we interview someone, especially for longer pieces of work, we are so dead set on getting the questions right that we forget to look and listen, to smell and to snoop. People will tell you things when asked. But the objects around them, the things they wear, sometimes speak more eloquently than the words they use. Two examples.

I interviewed Jay Naidoo soon after the Reconstruction and Development Programme was launched, with the former unionist as the minister in charge. He tried to make light of a profound contradiction – the pressure to meet the housing and infrastructure needs of people who had already waited too long,

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on one hand; the tight rein of a government unwilling just to throw money at a problem, on the other. He was wearing a stylish suit, and yet on a coat stand in the corner, he had his leather jacket and cap ready for township duty, the uniform of his activist days. Nothing he said could express the contradiction more eloquently.

A few years later, some men concerned about the role of their brothers in the country's misery – violence, abuse of women and children, desperate and destructive drinking – decided that something had to be done. The action was inspired by the Million Man March on Washington, but the gathering consisted mostly of men in suits. And the fact that they had scheduled their first march on a day that clashed with the Chiefs–Pirates match suggested that they weren't yet thinking enough about how to draw ordinary working men into their ranks.

I was exploring this issue and others with Bongani Khumalo, then high up in Eskom and one of the organisers of the event. Passionate about his cause, as he spread his arms wide to make a point, I noticed that as the cuff of his well-cut suit rode up his wrist it revealed a bracelet made of small shells. I asked him about it and learned that it was a gift from his father, a migrant worker who laid tracks up and down South Africa and was hardly ever at home. Despite this, Khumalo said, he was a man whose positive loving presence was strongly felt in the lives of his family. Suddenly we had a real way into that key question – how could a movement of South African men harness the energy and example of ordinary but heroic men like that?

This story has a nice little footnote. Many years later, I interviewed Khumalo again when he took over as head of Transnet. Since it was a short radio interview, I didn't mention the bracelet again. But I did make mention of his father, asking what he would have made of the fact that his son now ran the economic giant in which he had been a poorly paid worker. And while that wasn't the main focus of the interview, it enriched it hugely, highlighting how far some South Africans have moved in just one generation.

When you have the real privilege of meeting people face to face, especially in personal space, remember: look and listen, smell and snoop. There is graffiti on the walls and music playing in the background – I was once chatting to a boxer who was talking about using his fists to escape poverty and the radio blaring out in the gym switched to Jimi Hendrix's 'All Along the Watchtower'. The song starts with these words: 'There must be some kind of way out of here.' Look for pictures on desks and walls – by the way, the complete absence

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of any can tell a story of its own. And when objects strike you as significant, don't forget to explore their origins. Even if they are not in the room.

I was interviewing Sam Nzima, the photographer who shot the unforgettable picture of Hector Petersen, an image that became the symbol of the struggle against apartheid. I was already saying my thanks at the end of the interview and rising from my chair, when the photographer with whom I was working, Eric Miller, asked Nzima if he still had the camera with which he had shot this extraordinary photograph. Nzima fetched the camera, talked about where he had got it, and as I watched him handle it with love and respect, the intro to my story quietly wrote itself.

Questions, questions

Ultimately, of course, the success of an interview will depend on the quality of the questions you ask. And that, in turn, will depend a lot, too, on how well you have prepared. Even with longer feature pieces and profiles, you cannot justify taking up any real time asking people for factual details about themselves and their careers, or for information about new policies, plans or laws. You should have got that information from press clippings, CVs sent through by secretaries and agents, and documents picked up off the Internet.

Apart from wasting everybody's time by asking for stuff that's already on the record, interviewees are often irritated if your questions suggest that you haven't bothered to prepare. Bore them and they will bore you back. By contrast, if you show some insight and a desire to look at things in depth, your subject will invariably reward you with something – and nothing beats the feeling when someone says: 'That's a very good question.'

To illustrate how research and preparation can help sharpen a question, let's play Spot the Difference. Question 1 to the Director-General of Health: 'How far have you got with the roll-out of the antiretroviral programme?' Question 2 to the same person: 'KZN, Gauteng and Western Cape have taken the lead in the antiretroviral roll-out. What key things are they doing that the other six provinces are not?' Question 1 is guaranteed to produce a long, long answer, some of which may be useful, but most of which will be known. Question 2 not only narrows the focus, but also challenges your subject to explain and not just describe.

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This is particularly critical in news-driven situations when you are working with time constraints – like at press conferences or during those snatched opportunities when you catch important people on the move. But it also makes a big difference when you're interviewing for features and profiles: 'You've said that your high-school music teacher was the biggest influence on your career. What was so special about Mr Khumalo?' As opposed to: 'Who was the biggest influence on your career, ho-hum?'

So if you find yourself hearing sentences filled with phrases like 'role players and stake-holders, capacity building and win–win outcomes', it's time to nail things down.

If your pre-interview research doesn't produce any relevant facts, make it your mission during the interview to get those facts, because they will be new. There are many areas of interest and importance where the key players have got used to getting away with air and steam. So if you find yourself hearing sentences filled with phrases like 'role players and stakeholders, capacity building and win–win outcomes', it's time to nail things down. Who exactly will you be meeting with and when? Capacity building? How many people do you plan to train/hire and how much money has been allocated for this? If you think the answer back in the office to the question, 'What did he/she say?' is going to be 'Nothing much', know that you must try to pin your subject down to something specific.

Once again, this doesn't just apply to news stories. Feature pieces are profoundly enriched by facts. I was interviewing the boxer Vuyani Bungu and we got chatting about his first professional fight. He described the bout, and then I asked him what he earned for it. I could have stopped when he said: 'I won R36', but I pushed a little more. What did you buy with it? His answer – 'We bought chicken pieces and rice or potatoes, a loaf of bread, paraffin and some candles' – suddenly painted this vivid picture of what it meant to a young boy to help fill his family's stomachs and hearts with his fists.

Preparation will take you some of the way. So will listening carefully to the answers and quickly calculating whether you have something or not. But there is another art, especially when you're working on live radio, or trying to make something of the one chance you get at a packed press conference. Occasionally you have to use part of your question to convey information, and provide a clear signpost to the subject of where you don't want to go – like the example, above, about the antiretroviral roll-out.

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Wording questions in the most effective way is a skill that takes constant work. You will make mistakes, but don't let that throw you…

But avoid making speeches – there is nothing more satisfying than coming up with a question that is short and sharp. One moment I enjoyed came during an interview with Judge Johan Kriegler, after it was announced that he would be leaving the Independent Electoral Commission before the 1999 poll. It was widely believed that Kriegler was a difficult guy to work with, but like most difficult guys he wouldn't respond very warmly to the question: 'Are you a difficult guy?' So instead I asked him: 'Were your colleagues uncomfortable with what you were saying or how you were saying it?' Normally pretty non-committal, he responded by saying: 'Ooh! That's a tricky question.' I enjoyed that.

There are a few bad habits worth trying to avoid. Don't ask questions that are too open-ended: 'What are your goals now that you are CEO?' Avoid questions where the answer can be a simple yes or no: 'Are you concerned about the emigration of trained nurses to Commonwealth countries?' And constantly look to narrow the field of the answer. For example: 'How do you plan to tackle the shortage of teachers?' works less well than 'In tackling the shortage of teachers, what can you commit to achieving within the next six months?'

Wording questions in the most effective way is a skill that takes constant work. You will make mistakes, but don't let that throw you, even if the interviewee indicates he or she doesn't understand. Whatever happens in your career, you will almost certainly never repeat the mistake of the well-known British TV interviewer, who was quizzing a leading Labour Party minister about the fallout from the Iraq war.

This was the question he asked: 'What about the, the opinion polls and all the things that have come recently and the drop in confidence and honesty and all those, all those credibility things that have come along, the big change and just the drop, halving the lead as this week and all of that, what, what has gone wrong whether temporarily or permanently or whatever, what's gone wrong, why has there been this sea-change in the attitudes of the government from the, I mean the honeymoon lasted a long while but it's, it's certainly over at the moment isn't it?'

However much you fumble for words, it will never come out as badly as that. Fortunately for him, the interviewee didn't say: 'Can you repeat the question?'

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CHAPTER TEN

Freelance journalism

Marianne Thamm

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‘So, who do you work for?’ is a question I’m still asked frequently.

At the start of my freelance career about seven years ago, I would recite the list of publications I had scribbled next to the various stories that had been commissioned or sold. But it never felt right. The whole point of going it alone, I reckoned, was to gain more control over how I worked, with whom I worked and what I worked on. Saying that I was doing a piece for this newspaper or that magazine didn’t mean I was working for that publication.

It began making sense when it dawned on me that I worked for myself. It was a simple realisation, one that should have been obvious. But journalists generally don’t think like business people. I certainly had never been taught how to market my work or myself. The recognition that I was now my own boss and that I was essentially running a small business altered entirely my approach to my work. It enabled me to focus on building a ‘core business’ while understanding that I needed to expand the range of work I could offer.

Although I had enjoyed full-time employment in the 19 years that I had worked for a variety of newspapers and magazines, I had begun to experience the exclusivity and predictability of the situation as rather limiting. Over the years I had gone from working for a daily newspaper, to a weekly and then monthly magazine. The specialist nature of the content (it was a woman's magazine) – although it did at the time shoot quite innovatively and broadly – automatically excluded a whole range of topics and subjects that I found interesting and that I knew would make for good reading.

I found that out of the five or six ideas I'd have for a story or a feature, only one would be suitable for that specific publication. I began to keep track of these ideas, wondering when or if I'd ever get to them.

And then one day I jumped. I paged through my notebook of thoughts and ideas and felt that it was perhaps time to resign and go it alone. I wouldn't do it that way again. It was insane and I had no idea what I had let myself in for. All I had was this notebook and relatively good contacts in an industry I had come to know and understand. Today I'd be much more cautious and make sure that I had some kind of business plan. I hadn't even bought my own PC when I walked out of formal employment.

While writing remains my main source of income, I have had to learn to multitask and cultivate other skills to top up the range of 'services' I am able to offer a variety of clients.

But I had little time to think before plunging into my first major departure from the routine of day-to-day journalism. A few months later I began work on a book, rape survivor Alison's story titled *I Have Life*. At the time, I had no idea that it would go on to become a bestseller translated into at least four languages. The discipline and the stamina I needed to conjure up to complete this massive, all-consuming project set a tone and pace that I have strived to maintain ever since.

While writing remains my main source of income, I have had to learn to multitask and cultivate other skills to top up the range of 'services' I am able to offer a variety of clients. Apart from my columns, features and the usual interviews or stories I do for magazines and the odd newspaper, I also edit, teach, do the occasional bit of public speaking and have done research for a television documentary. I have published two of my own small books and will continue to ghostwrite as I find it one of the most effective ways to keep exercising my writing muscle.

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I have also had to learn how to run a small business and to deal with the concomitant responsibilities – like bookkeeping, office administration and providing for my own medical aid, pension and various other expenses (computer, telephones, office equipment, stationery, and so on).

There is an enduring myth about freelancing or the life of the independent writer among salaried or employed writers, journalists and editors who have never tried it. It is that freelancing is somehow about slowing down, shifting to a lower gear and that you can do it from some isolated rural retreat. There is also a commonly held belief that one doesn't have a 'real job' and that researching, writing and marketing your work will somehow miraculously slot in comfortably between growing herbs, changing nappies or tinkering with the Harley. That is not freelancing. It's working part-time.

I found that my workload trebled and in the early years I forgot the meaning of words like 'weekend', 'public holiday', 'annual or sick leave' or 'bonus'. It was exhilarating but exhausting. Somehow, because I worked for myself and could do so during hours that suited me, I had no resentment.

It took about two years for my little business to break even and I now exist within a time frame and routine that is entirely my own.

When is a good time?

Mid-career. Newly qualified, young or junior journalists should try to get a few years experience in a newsroom or with a magazine. You need to understand the industry and have good contacts before you can think of going it alone. Don't consider freelancing as an alternative to a job you loathe. Freelancing is not an escape – it is drastic change of direction.

Do it if you love writing and do not want to end up as an editor. Many good writers are eventually given editing jobs and stop writing. If you are a writer, want to remain one and grow and learn new skills, then go ahead, freelance.

So how does it work?

When you 'go freelance' you will discover that no one comes to you – you have to go to them. In all the years I have flown solo, I have received about ten commissions. The hundreds of other stories I have sold or placed have all been ideas that I have marketed to editors. Connect with the world, live through

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Connect with the world, live through your skin and not in it, and you will have enough ideas to last you a lifetime.

your skin and not in it, and you will have enough ideas to last you a lifetime.

Being half Portuguese has come in handy for me; editors who call seldom escape without my having sold a bit on the side. Make sure you know the market, be it print (newspapers or magazines) or electronic (e-publishing). Understand who publishes what, what the style is of that particular publication and who they believe their readers to be. All of this will help you to aim your pitch in the right direction.

Pitching an idea or a story means you need to get an editor as excited or interested in the subject matter as you are. The more topical the issue and the more it connects with broader social, political or economic issues, the more likely it is to be published. Be sure also that your subjects or the idea that you have pitched is immediately 'actionable'. If editors like it they will probably expect you to do it almost instantly.

As a freelancer you need to learn to maximise time and effort in relation to what you will be paid. It's as crude as that. And what you are paid depends on how well you work, how well you are known in the business and how much that magazine or publication has available in its budget.

Remember, you will be responsible for all your own bills, not only your monthly accounts but also those that are associated with a particular story. You can occasionally arrange to be reimbursed for travel costs or lunches but generally these are regarded to be included in your fee. Sadly it does not pay to do investigative pieces, so do not take them on. They are extremely costly and time consuming, which is why good newspapers have their own investigative units. Pass good and necessary investigative pieces on to colleagues who are employed full-time – unless, of course, it is a subject you are passionate about and you don't mind cutting into your overdraft to do it.

The freelance market in South Africa has grown enormously in the last ten years and many publishing groups only make use of freelancers. It is possible to earn a decent albeit fluctuating income from the myriad commercial, specialist and trade magazines or websites. Newspapers generally pay extremely badly and are best avoided.

Create a niche for your particular brand of writing or become a specialist, for example, on health, humour, film or entertainment, motoring, finance or travel. If you view your writing as more than just text next to a photograph, editors will notice your work and so will readers.

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It's okay to write about yourself if you are established (for example, Barry Ronge, Bongani Madondo, Khadija Margardie, Mark Gevisser, John Matshikiza, to name only a few) and editors often demand this particular style of narrative writing. But, there is nothing wrong with churning out copy about décor, fashion or where the best delis are if that's what you enjoy doing. If you are passionate about your work it will translate into your writing.

As a freelancer you need to learn to maximise time and effort in relation to what you will be paid. It's as crude as that.

Keep pushing boundaries. Learn new skills, such as how a website is designed or managed or how to write a film script or play. Prepare yourself to deal with and manage constant change, a situation that might not be suited to personalities seeking security and containment.

Don't hang out with other journalists or writers if you can help it, unless they are friends, of course. It's better to connect with people who are doing things in the big world out there and who can lead you to or tip you off about something that would make a good story.

Remember that freelancers have less protection than domestic workers. The challenge is to make a sometimes ruthless market work in your favour. Commercial media are insatiable, gargantuan monsters that gobble up stories faster than you can say 'invoice'.

You need

- an extensive contact book updated constantly;
- an office that is separate from the rest of your home;
- a telephone line that is separate from your domestic line;
- a reference library;
- subscriptions to most of the major newspapers and magazines;
- access to radio and television;
- access to the web;
- transport;
- a bank overdraft (no business functions without one);
- a thick skin;
- silence; and
- good ideas.

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Dos

- Get to know the market and sell your stories to suitable publications.
- Find out who edits what and exactly who it is you need to approach with a pitch.
- Read. Books, websites, magazines, the classified sections of newspapers, reports, surveys, studies and even food packaging. Read as much and as widely as you can. You need input to get output.
- Get clear briefs; either write it yourself or ask the relevant editor to do so.
- Inquire, up front, about rate of pay or kill fees. Journalists are often too shy or embarrassed to ask about money or to negotiate a fee. Get over it. Also ask whether tax will be deducted upfront. I prefer this as you don't have to pay a lump sum later.
- Make sure your copy is clean and that you have stuck to the exact word count. There is nothing more annoying for an editor than wading through 4 000 words when you have been asked for 1 800. Make cuts yourself. If editors request more wordage, then make sure you invoice for any additional work.
- Send an invoice with the finished feature, story, article or column. Be sure to number the invoice and to include your address and telephone numbers, your banking details as well as your income-tax reference number.
- Always meet your deadlines. If you can't, give the editor enough warning.
- Recycle some of your work if you retain the rights. It often pays to do a piece for an overseas publication and to resell it in South Africa. Do not try to recycle stories to local magazines; editors will get very annoyed. The issue of copyright is a contentious one in this country as most publishing groups presume to own all rights to your work once they have published it. Find out what rights you can retain.
- Be discreet and do not discuss the politics or the issues of the various publications you work for with their rivals. The ability to trust and be trusted is one of the most important qualities you can bring to your freelance relationships.
- Answer work-related e-mails as soon as possible.
- Be prepared to work to extremely tight deadlines. Editors often rely on freelancers to quickly 'turn around' stories. It's a challenge but not all

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stories can be done this way. Be very selective with these types of commissions; they could lead to compromises and could cost you more than they are worth.

- Be disciplined. Set routines and stick to them. Your work hours should be the equivalent (and in most cases more) of those you would have spent working for someone else. If you work consistently you will earn a good income.
- Familiarise yourself with media ethics and press law.
- Be afraid of an empty page. That fear is what gives you an edge and it helps to remind you to do your best. Learn to live with it. If it ever leaves, panic. Feeling insecure or apprehensive about writing means you still give a damn about it.

Don'ts

- Don't work for free. Some editors will pull the 'We don't have a budget but it will be good for exposure' trick, but don't fall for it. They won't be saying that to the printers or any of the other suppliers. The car won't go far on exposure and the dogs won't like eating it either. I'd rather starve than give any commercial publication work for nothing. You will never earn the respect you deserve if you work for free and you will end up back in full-time employment in a grey, partitioned office sooner than you can say 'IRP5'.
- Never give away ideas to editors or talk about them with writers you do not know or trust. People forget where they first heard an idea; it's not that they steal them deliberately, it's just they don't think like you do when they're accustomed to getting a monthly salary. Ideas are what will keep your business afloat. Ideas are your most precious reserves. This is the information age and information and knowledge are not free. Same goes for your contacts. You can of course pass on a number to a colleague you trust but generally a journalist is as good as her or his contact book.
- Responding to general e-mails from editors, for you to pitch ideas, can be awful traps and are an indication of an editor who has no idea what she or he wants. It will probably also be difficult for you to extract your money from such a publication.

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- It's not a good idea to work for newly established or unknown publications. Many a freelancer has been left out of pocket by smaller, start-up publications. If you can, insist on part-payment beforehand.
- Don't be tempted to do the work for public relations people. There is a general belief that freelance writers are always looking for work and PR firms often use unsuspecting writers to get stories into magazines or newspapers. PRs are paid to place stories for their clients. It is unethical for journalists to work with PR people. In the end you will have to bill the newspaper or magazine and fight for your money while the PR has been paid by his or her client. Don't blur the lines.
- Guard against taking on too much work. In other words don't say yes to everything. Be discriminating. If you are not, you will end up churning out stories that might undermine your professionalism.
- Don't cut corners. Do proper research. On the other hand, be careful not to over-research a subject and become bogged down in a mass of notes for an 800- or 2 000-word piece.
- Don't get hysterical. The print media environment is full of surprises. If your copy is pulled or you are asked to make changes (with which you agree), accept this as part of the business. Do so graciously.
- Never get personal. Maintain good working relationships even if you do not like a specific editor.

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Retainers: good or bad?

Usually a bad idea. In South Africa retainers amount to little more than a bad salary. Many freelancers like some sort of steady, regular income and feel safer having a retainer. The retainer binds you to a specific publication and although this might seem like a good idea it can work to your disadvantage. Editors may feel they somehow 'own' you or have 'bought' your time. You will be asked to write things on the spur of the moment or be called on to 'brainstorm' ideas or various other tasks that may fall outside of what it is you would like to supply to this particular commitment.

Should you go this route, be sure that the terms, conditions and parameters of a retainer are clearly negotiated and that they are strictly adhered to. If you are called to participate in a meeting that might take up two or three hours of your time be sure to bill your client for that time.

Pros

- The isolation. This drives some freelancers insane but those of us who have made it past five years are generally unable to work communally ever again. You will be amazed at how much time you gain by not having to interact with assorted colleagues. Working alone allows you to determine who you wish to see and when.
- You can earn as much as you like – it's up to you. Your income will fluctuate from month to month but one thing you can be sure of, if you work consistently and diligently you will earn well.
- The variety, scope and possibility of work assignments and the opportunity to learn new skills.

Cons

- The isolation. Many freelancers feel cut off and out of touch and miss the daily interaction with colleagues. Counteract this by arranging regular work meetings with colleagues in a similar position. Or use time to meet with people or contacts who are connected to the world. Join a political/economic/social discussion group. Make sure that you are listed with organisations or departments that send out press alerts.
- Getting accustomed to an irregular income is difficult for some freelancers.
- Getting so used to working alone that you would find it difficult to work in a team. Some see this as a pro.

Prospects for freelance writers, journalists and editors have never been better. In the past 15 years various advances in technology have literally and figuratively freed a wide spectrum of professionals – including writers – from permanent, full-time employment with one company located in a specific physical space. But flying solo without the right engine won't get you anywhere. In the end, the biggest and best secret to successful freelancing is the cultivation of those qualities that drive any good journalist or writer – curiosity, passion, enthusiasm, tenacity and stamina.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

News editing

John MacLennan

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The newsroom is the heart of any news organisation. It produces the product – news – that gives the organisation its very reason for existence. And the person who ensures it keeps ticking smoothly is the news editor. The job calls for many special talents and abilities. The most important of these is probably the ability to endure. This is because, in my experience anyway, it is the toughest job a news organisation can offer in terms of unremitting stress against apparently insurmountable odds. But it does provide exhilaration if and when the plan comes together. The downside, of course, is that in this real world things often go wrong.

A news editor's job description would include a vast range of tasks. Some of it is routine, like drawing up a news diary, fixing inadequate copy, avoiding legal pitfalls, keeping rosters, monitoring leave and days off for overtime, offering comfort and dispensing discipline. You also have to lead and motivate a team of reporters.

So why would anybody want to become a news editor? They are not particularly highly rewarded, they are blamed when the wheels come off, they are rarely praised when things go right and they frequently suffer burn-out. All this makes for a highly stressful job.

These perspectives come from my 13 years on the desk, three at the *Weekend Argus* and ten at the *Sunday Tribune*. Even though I worked for Sunday papers, I believe most of what follows can be adapted, whether you work for a medium with immediate, daily, weekly or monthly deadlines.

Not many journalists aspire to becoming news editors. Most are drafted into the job because they are successful reporters and their predecessor has perhaps been promoted or succumbed to exhaustion. Some see the news editor's chair as a step to greater things. There is no doubt you would normally get a salary increase if you took the job, but beware. If you are any good at it you might just stay there for years while your peers are promoted to better-paid and less-stressful jobs.

News editors need to be inquisitive and determined… They must be streetwise, possess a streak of low, animal cunning, take setbacks philosophically, be strong team leaders… and always be geared to compete.

Others are attracted by the power that goes with the news editor's job. They believe it is glamorous. You command people to come and go. What you say counts. It is true that whoever runs the desk can certainly make reporters' lives unpleasant. You are allowed to throw your weight around for the right reasons, but – again – beware. You will not get the best out of the team if you are on an ego trip. In fact, the team might work against you.

So who would make a good news editor? Very few are born to the job, like those rare writers who have a natural gift for the deft, descriptive phase, or star reporters with a talent for extracting information from the right people at the right time with the right approach.

Nor can journalists be trained specifically as news editors. Ideally, news editors should have a thorough grounding in all aspects of reporting and some experience of subediting. They should be able to do any reporting job better or as well as the best reporter in the newsroom. And they should know something about the law.

News editors need to be inquisitive and determined. More than that, they have to be able to think both laterally and fast. They must be streetwise, possess

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a streak of low, animal cunning, take setbacks philosophically, be strong team leaders, be able to motivate individuals, and always be geared to compete.

That's asking a lot. Most good journalists have many of these qualities. The successful news editor will learn the rest swiftly, and not always pleasantly, under pressure.

In addition you will have to be the champion of your staff, defending their interests at all times when they are in the right. Here you are in a difficult position, because you also represent the editor in his or her dealings with reporters, and it is not always easy to determine whether a reporter is in the right.

I was caught in the middle once during a union-backed go-slow after national wage talks broke down. I told reporters I still expected them to produce, albeit at a slower rate. They hoped their efforts, or lack of it, would force management to cave in. I also told the editor I would not help him and his other executives subedit the paper, something they had to do because the subs were also on go-slow. Result: I was excoriated by both sides.

Let's say you are offered the news editor's job. Your first and vital step is to reach agreement with your editor on a number of issues. You need to know what your duties and responsibilities are. Some editors and their assistants like to pass the buck and dump responsibilities and chores on the news editor – as well as the blame when things go wrong. When I asked what my duties were I was told: 'Everything.'

You also need to know what your powers are and how far the editor will back you. I was lucky. On the *Tribune*, Ian Wyllie and his successors gave me a more-or-less free hand, with Wyllie, especially, coming out to take on the forces of darkness – anyone who tried to interfere with us doing our job.

Some editors are very 'hands on'. They regard themselves as super news editors, in which case your role is reduced to that of secretary. No good. Check out the editor. If he or she is like that, and inflexible, it will be better to give the opportunity a miss.

At the initial meeting with the editor you need to extract a few promises. Remember that potential news editors are difficult to find. If you are offered the job then it means they want you and the editor is likely to make concessions.

You need the power to hire reporters. This is essential because you could be saddled with people who are hired by others regardless of their ability. They come on board as a favour to somebody or as friends of friends. Remember

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that you will have to do the best you can with the staff you have, so it makes sense that you employ people with proven ability and to whom you can relate.

You need to interview them personally, you need to check them out and you have to have a fair idea of what the person will do for the organisation. Are you looking for an environment expert, a humorous writer, someone to cover politics?

You need agreement on your staff complement as well as an undertaking from the editor that replacements will be hired as and when staff leave. You don't want to sit for months with vacancies while management saves on salaries and you battle to produce the news.

If you are on a newspaper then you also need to ensure that your staff is not required to write advertorial, the so-called 'commercial features'. This is not journalism and providing this sort of sponsored 'copy' should not be the job of the newsroom.

I tended to be overprotective of staff at times because I hired some weird and wonderful people. All the same, I knew they could and did deliver when it counted.

Ask for control or at the very least a say in overseeing the newsroom budget. Who knows, you might just get lucky. You should realise that the budget might be raided for purposes other than getting the news. And when you need to send someone on an expensive assignment you might be told the budget is depleted. So you need to know how to plan and run a budget.

If the editor has any sense, you will also be consulted on salary increases. This is your opportunity to make a case for the winners on your team. Your stars should receive bigger increases and this will help you retain them.

Ensure the editor accepts that you are the 'gateway' to the reporters. You alone should be able to brief them or make demands and it is up to you to discipline them, except in extreme disciplinary cases. It makes for confusion and wasted effort when you find that an assistant editor has asked a reporter to do a special assignment of which you have no knowledge. As news editor you may even feel the assignment is a bad idea in the first place.

You may find the editor agrees to your every request during the initial chat before you accept the job. Clarify these points in a follow-up interview, write a memo recording the details of your agreement and perhaps even ask the editor to sign it. Provide the editor with a copy. With that 'contract' in your possession it will be very difficult for the editor to renege.

As the 'gateway' to reporters, the news editor is usually the one who fields

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calls from irate readers and/or sources. Defend your reporter on the phone as best you can. But have it out in the privacy of your office with the reporter if the complaint is justified.

It will be your task to build team spirit. There are many ways of doing this. Try to create an atmosphere where work is both fun and a challenge. You may also spend time drinking, eating and talking with staff, inviting them to your home for the odd braai, sometimes giving them a shoulder to cry on.

This is tough on marriage. We took strain – but we survived. After a while the *Tribune* reporters were a team who used to go out and carouse together because they liked each other.

I remember getting a call from the owner of a restaurant who wanted to know what I was going to do about words painted on the ceiling after a dinner that turned into a wild party. They read: 'Team Tribune – Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll!' In cases like that you don't inform the editor. You tell those responsible to get to the restaurant immediately, repaint the ceiling and apologise handsomely. Remember, they are your guys.

I tended to be overprotective of staff at times because I hired some weird and wonderful people. All the same, I knew they could and did deliver when it counted.

We had one reporter who had to be dried out for weeks at a time on two occasions. Another talented reporter simply disappeared. His cottage, we found, was unlocked and abandoned. After checking the hospitals and mortuary we eventually reported him missing. Months later I received a call from a news editor in Australia who wanted to check him out because he had arrived there and applied for a job.

The only 'extreme disciplinary case' I recall was when a senior staffer was found guilty of cheating heavily on expenses.

Listen to reporters if they have personal problems. I still blame myself for not detecting that a good reporter had taken to using cocaine and after a while he just could not function. Then he apparently got into trouble with drug dealers, left the paper in a hurry and was later found dead in London. He died from a gunshot to the head. I don't know whether it was suicide or whether the dealers got him.

If you listen to reporters' problems, then they will also have sympathy for yours. So I was astonished to find that reporters were sometimes working in the newsroom until the early hours of the morning to meet a 7am deadline.

I tried to sell the idea that our reporters were three times better than the

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opposition. This made them feel good and in real life they had to be because our main rival had three times as many staffers as we had. I once got a call from our people covering a Formula One Grand Prix. They were at a severe disadvantage, they said, because there were only five of them, including photographers. The *Sunday Times* had 15 reporters. 'So what's new?' I asked. 'That's the right ratio.'

On the *Tribune* we waged a virtual war against the *Sunday Times* as it invaded our circulation heartland in KwaZulu-Natal. At the end of every week we would add up our wins or losses in news terms: Did the competition beat us with any exclusives? Did they have better coverage of stories on which we competed? Or, joy of joys, did we score more exclusives and better coverage? If we beat them it was cause for jubilation. If we lost then it was misery.

But let's go back to some of those news editor qualities you may need. In taking the job, accept you will have to work longer hours than anybody in the organisation and you will never be completely off duty. Not even on holiday.

Curiosity. You have to know and care about what is happening. You do so by reading every newspaper you can lay your hands on before the reporters start work, by listening to radio discussions and news bulletins, by meeting people over lunch and at other functions you will attend in the course of the job. As you get to know sources you will set up a flow of ideas and tips that you can pass to reporters. Make a habit of carrying a small notebook in which to jot down names, phone numbers and ideas.

Determination. Good stories are not easy to find, especially not Sunday-type stories, which are hardly ever based on breaking news.

People often do their best to block your access. Don't let them.

This is where lateral thinking and animal cunning come in. It was standard practice, for example, for our reporters to buy a bunch of flowers in order to gain access to people in hospital – as long as they were not in too much discomfort – when the authorities had banned the press from the wards. They would go in at visiting time. Usually the person concerned had no objection.

On another occasion some ANC luminaries took refuge in the British Consulate in Durban. Police prevented the press from seeing them, so our team borrowed lawyers' robes and went in with the ANC legal team to secure interviews and pictures.

Then there was the time they started shooting a film about Rorke's Drift. This would have made for a good picture feature as the latter-day Zulu

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warriors and Redcoats fell on each other in gory battle. But they would not let the press onto the set. So a reporter signed up as an extra and we got the inside story.

At the end of every week we would add up our wins or losses in news terms: Did the competition beat us with any exclusives? Did they have better coverage of stories on which we competed?

A bottle of Scotch also goes a long way. After Marlene Lehnberg was put away for the so-called 'Scissors Murder' of her lover's wife many years ago, the lover rang after the paper appeared one Saturday evening to congratulate us on our coverage. I asked him if he would like to talk about it. When he said yes we sent around a reporter bearing a bottle under his arm. He secured the full inside story plus exclusive pictures for the following edition.

Don't flinch from threats too easily. And this includes those that come your way from senior people within your own news organisation who might disagree with some of your targets. We once carried a story, for example, about shenanigans in the butchery section of a supermarket chain. They were prime advertisers in the paper and our advertising manager was livid. We won.

The metaphorical street-fighting ability helps in dealing with those who attempt to bully your reporters. Don't put up with it.

Think on your feet. You have to be one step ahead of everyone. And you can do so by getting up earlier and working harder than anyone else.

Nobody likes disappointments, so you have to be pragmatic when things go against you. This happens when plans to land a story go wrong, when staff let you down or when management attempts to block an initiative for cost reasons.

One of the most unpleasant and demanding things you will have to do is to become a clerk. An amazing amount of paperwork will land on your desk. Some days I would have to clear the heaped 'in' tray three times. And you have to look at absolutely everything because among the rubbish there may be nuggets of gold.

If you have a deputy, and can trust this person to be your eyes and ears, then you could delegate much of this function. You will also be fortunate if the deputy is experienced enough to help mentor staff and rewrite stories under pressure.

Your two greatest allies are your diary and a concertina datefile. (These days you could do much of this on computer.) I kept a big office diary on my desk. In this I recorded ideas, anniversaries of events, reporters' intended

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absences, reporters' overtime work and plans for difficult holiday periods. Reporters were asked to use it as well. In it I would also record events occurring days, weeks, months and sometimes a year ahead. This would ensure you could plan well in advance.

The datefile had sleeves for the day of the month. In this I would drop cuttings, hand-outs, invitations and check it every day to see what was coming up. It's an easy way to keep track of relevant bits of paperwork.

The buck stops with you in regard to all to do with your staff and the news operation. So you have to be a housekeeper. Keep track of everything and make sure that everything works – ranging from air conditioners, to aircraft bookings to… you name it. It's your eventual responsibility.

You cannot keep track of the world by yourself, so news editors have to rely on reporters for advance warning as well as specialised contacts. Consider introducing a beat system with different people covering areas like education, the environment, health, labour, politics, the unions and so on.

Think on your feet. You have to be one step ahead of everyone. And you can do so by getting up earlier and working harder than anyone else.

The detail of the news editor's job differs according to the organisation. My week would start with the editor's conference for the entire staff. Before this happened I would give him my opinion on our performance, as well as listen to any complaints he might want to pass on. He would use my views as he saw fit at his general staff conference.

At the separate news editor's conference I would go through our paper and those of our rivals in some detail listing the 'They hads' (stories we would have liked to have had), 'We hads' (stories they missed and we had), 'Bads' (vital stories we missed or other lapses), and 'Goods' (vital stories the opposition missed and we had not).

Knowing that your performance will be assessed in the presence of your peers is a powerful motivator. A little appreciation goes a long way, so when we got things right I offered sincere thanks to the reporter while his or her colleagues witnessed the praise and glory.

I know of one news editor who, in spite of his busy daily routine on *The Star*, would write brief notes of commendation occasionally if a reporter deserved it for exceptional work. Copies of this would be sent to the editor and from him to the manager for the reporter's file. These herograms improve morale and help when the time comes for salary increases.

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You can express disappointment about missing a story to your team, but criticism of an individual should be in private.

It is also important that you are consistent. Your reporters need to know what your rules and expectations are and that they apply to everyone with proper allowance for particular skill or seniority.

I would have to compile a weekly diary or job list at the news editor's conference at the beginning of the week in co-operation with the reporters. I would have started this the previous day at home, then checked the desk diary and datefile. I would also touch base with the editor for his input. On a daily newspaper, the diary must be compiled each day. Included in the diary would be a list of ideas that were sure to be unpopular for a variety of reasons. Reporters who did not have good ideas of their own would be saddled with some of these.

When it comes to dishing out assignments, don't tell people what to do. Ask them how they see the story, come up with your own views on the important aspects and how it should be tackled. Try for a meeting of the minds.

Sometimes a reporter will tell you it is just a downright bad story idea. Don't explode. Ask the reporter why. Sometimes the reporter will be right.

At other times you may have to prevail. Best thing to do then, if time permits, is to lead from the front. Take over the story yourself and ensure you do a good job. Next time, if there is a next time, you won't face so many arguments.

A news editor has to keep the editor informed and you therefore need to keep in close touch with reporters to assess their progress and help them with difficulties. This is so you can provide an even flow of news to the subeditors.

News editors are the editor's frontline. In the midst of a very busy day filled with demands for copy, people problems, and changing situations you are expected to pass only polished and clean copy to the subeditors. As a start, this means it should read well, it should have no holes that create questions in the reader's mind. And there should be no spelling or grammatical mistakes. (You would be surprised to know how few people can spell 'accommodation', for example. And some people with university degrees don't know the difference between 'toe the line' and 'tow the line'.)

Sometimes a reporter will tell you it is just a downright bad story idea. Don't explode. Ask the reporter why. Sometimes the reporter will be right.

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So have a good dictionary in the newsroom as well as a thesaurus. If your reporters have the use of these and they still come up with sloppy work then you have every reason to come down on them. You are not there to wipe bums.

Above all, you need to ensure that stories are not actionable, that they fall within the law and that they are fair. Has the other party been given a chance to respond?

You have the potential to make people's lives most unpleasant. But this is inefficient. Stop and listen. Somebody might just have a better plan. Remember that you have to lead a team and this requires a cool head under all sorts of provocation and pressure. May the force be with you… you'll need it.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Journalism and the law

Jacques Louw

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The Cape Flats, on the outskirts of Cape Town, has long been known for its crime. Drug-peddling violent criminals have terrorised this community for years. By early 1996, the law-abiding section of the Cape Flats was fed up with the failure of the authorities to deal with the problems. They formed themselves into groups to protest against the state's apparent inability or perceived unwillingness to deal with drug abuse and the organised gangs of criminals and drug dealers. One such organisation had a substantial Muslim base and eventually grew into a formidable organisation known as People Against Drugs and Gangsterism, or by its more popular acronym, Pagad.

General public awareness of Pagad was first triggered by news reports of a protest march to Parliament in May 1996. From about that time and for the following eight years, the media coverage of this micro-society became a case study of the interaction between journalism and the law.

Pagad hit the world news headlines on Monday, 5 August 1996. It started the night before when a large group of Pagad supporters, infiltrated by security

forces, had made their way to Salt River, just outside Cape Town, on the edge of the city bowl. They were followed by a large, well-armed police contingent and a slightly smaller media contingent. The Pagad group gathered outside an illegal drug dispensary belonging to the infamous Staggie twin brothers in London Street. It was then that all hell broke loose. It is still disputed who shot first, but even the police officers on the scene ran for cover. In the mayhem, the journalists carried on doing their work, recording the events in the interest of the public. At that stage, the law was very far from their collective minds. Fortunately, none of the journalists were killed, although a few were wounded and hospitalised.

Half an hour later, the shooting was over. Large numbers of police reinforcements (more than 50) had arrived on the scene to 'mop up'. It was then that the gang boss Rachaad Staggie turned up. After remarkably being waved through by the police to drive his vehicle onto the crime scene, a few of the still enraged crowd encircled the vehicle and, in full view of the police and others (including the media), Staggie was shot through the head, torched and then repeatedly beaten and shot. Needless to say, the media continued to record this atrocity, in the interest of informing the public. Television cameras kept rolling (Reuters, APTV and the SABC were there) and press photographers, including Benjamin (Bennie) Gool, at that time photographer for the *Cape Times*, clicked away. The next day newspapers around the world carried Gool's photographs of the lynching and television channels broadcast the gruesome video footage.

Now when these journalists, whose journalistic acumen took them to the battlefront, did their work that night, the words and meaning of Section 16(1) of the Constitution of South Africa Act, 1996, which provides that 'Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media', were probably furthest from their thoughts. Little did they know that just two weeks later, they would each be the recipient of a subpoena to deliver their photographs and video material to the state. Thus started a long drawn-out legal saga that ended in court in February 2002, almost six years later. The case was a landmark involving 'media law' in the post-1994 democratic era and went directly to the principles of freedom of expression. The media groups involved – Independent Newspapers, Media24, Reuters, APTV and the SABC – forked out millions in legal expenses to protect their journalists.

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Gool was my client and his legal battle was also the last to be resolved. The principle behind the six-year legal marathon can best be summarised as follows: Everyone knew that Gool had taken photographs of the crime scene. After all, many of the pictures were published. It was common cause that there were more pictures than those actually published. The state wished to prosecute Staggie's killers and thought that Gool's unpublished photographs and his personal observations would be useful testimony at the trial. Gool would not testify, as he said that such action would infringe the freedom of the press. The state said that the interests of justice weighed more. There was a clash of rights.

'Why should journalists be treated differently? What qualifies them for special privileges?' The answers lie in the meaning of the phrase 'media law'.

At the time, I often heard the questions, 'Why should journalists be treated differently? What qualifies them for special privileges?' The answers lie in the meaning of the phrase 'media law'.

Strictly speaking, you cannot define 'media law' as a distinct category of the law. The term describes all the laws that impact on freedom of expression, whether by protecting it or by curbing the freedom, the latter being censorship in its various forms.

The idea of freedom of expression is not new. Judge Franz Rumpff, who later became Chief Justice of South Africa, said in court back in 1965, 'The freedom of speech – which includes the freedom to print – is a facet of civilisation which always presents two well-known inherent traits. The one consists of the constant desire by some to abuse it. The other is the inclination of those who want to protect it to repress more than is necessary.' This statement broadly describes the meaning of 'media law'. The learned judge continued: '[To repress] is also fraught with danger. It is based on intolerance and is a symptom of the primitive urge in mankind to prohibit that with which one does not agree. When a Court of Law is called upon to decide whether liberty should be repressed – in this case the freedom to publish a story – it should be anxious to steer a course as close to the preservation of liberty as possible. It should do so because freedom of speech is a hard-won and precious asset, yet easily lost.'

Even today the desire by those with the power to restrict the freedom of expression remains real. They try to achieve their goal by relying on the

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limitation clause (Section 36) in the Bill of Rights. The media play a crucial role in being vigilant by testing any attempt to restrict the public's right to receive information freely. The importance of the principle is summarised by Judge Meyer Joffe in his judgment in the case of *Government of the Republic of South Africa* v Sunday Times *Newspaper and Another*, where he says on page 227:

> *The role of the press in a democratic society cannot be understated. The press is in the frontline of the battle to maintain democracy. It is the function of the press to ferret out corruption, dishonesty and graft wherever it may occur and to expose the perpetrators. The press must reveal dishonest mal- and inept administration. It must also contribute to the exchange of ideas already alluded to. It must advance communication between the governed and those who govern. The press must act as the watchdog of the governed.*

One can understand the judge's statement in the context of clearly oppressive legislation. But where, you may ask, does the duty of the journalist to testify in court fit into all this? Surely, Gool's refusal to testify was after the publication, the subsequent calls to testify were in no way repressive and which source was he protecting? The answer is not as simple as these rhetorical questions would suggest.

In his affidavit before the court, Gool pleaded his case:

> *By compelling me to testify in these circumstances, or at all, my credibility as an independent and impartial journalist will be undermined. The trust that people have in my impartiality will be decreased significantly. It will engender mistrust with my sources and potential sources. I depend for my work on the trust that my sources have in me to be independent and, if necessary, protect their identity from disclosure. I depend on people who I speak to, photograph and see during the course of my work knowing and believing me to be independent. Requiring me to testify in this trial will cause people to mistrust me as a journalist and reduce my standing as an independent and impartial journalist. To get information about and lead me to news events, I rely on a combination of sources. Often, if I get information from one source I would be able to verify facts with reference to another*

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source. When I receive information I make decisions on how to use the information based, inter alia, on the following journalistic principles: if the information was given to me confidentially; if so, whether I would be able to use the information without disclosing sources; and whether I can attend an event without disclosing sources. If I attend an event on information given to me by more than one source, where those sources are from opposing camps, it is imperative that I am not seen to take any particular side. I try to be comprehensive in covering events and I strive towards objective reporting. Decisions about which photographs to use for publication would be made in consultation with editors, taking these principles into account. If I testify there will be consequences of this nature for the media as a whole; and the trust and belief in the impartiality and independence of journalists generally will be reduced because they will know that a journalist who they give information to, or co-operate with, may be compelled to testify in circumstances such as these or at all.

Eventually Gool won the day, when, before the Court could rule, the state threw in the towel. Regrettably the case did not set a precedent. In the past, other journalists have spent time in jail for the same thing. Even today, with constitutional protection, there will be times when courts will order journalists to testify. The test should be that it should only happen as a last resort. Unless a journalist is certain that all other avenues to obtain the evidence have been exhausted, testimony by the journalist should be refused. It could then still be possible that freedom of expression would outweigh the interests of the administration of justice. This much, at least, the state has agreed with the South African National Editors' Forum in 1998.

The violence in Cape Town escalated after 1996, with Pagad being blamed (wrongly or rightly) for bombings, and peaked in August 1998 when a bomb exploded in the Planet Hollywood restaurant in the V&A Waterfront. Again the violence made international news headlines and the public demanded an arrest. Authorities were anxious to oblige.

A few days after the blast, journalists received information from (not to be disclosed) sources that 'the bomber would be arrested at Cape Town International Airport'. The media were there and were not disappointed when eventually Waleed Suliman, a Cape Town businessman (and Pagad member) was

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Unless a journalist is certain that all other avenues to obtain the evidence have been exhausted, testimony by the journalist should be refused.

led out, handcuffed and in public display, by a burly security official. Cameras rolled and flashed. That night the SABC television news showed Suliman's arrest and fully covered the facts. Down in Cape Town, the debate in the conference room on whether to publish was settled for the editor of the *Cape Times*, Ryland Fisher, when the news came on at 8pm. It turned out that Suliman had been wrongly arrested. He was not the bomber. He happened to be a Muslim man wishing to travel to Egypt. Suliman sued the newspaper, which had published the photograph after the television news broadcast, for a few million in damages.

The case is interesting from a number of angles. Firstly, there was the question of the unlawful publication of the photograph of Suliman by the *Cape Times*. Secondly, there was Suliman's right to privacy. Then there was the question whether the newspaper had the right to publish after the television ran with the story – with Suliman's picture. Another issue was whether the content of the article was true. (The police had contrived a passport irregularity as an excuse for the arrest.)

The case finished six years later in the Supreme Court of Appeal and is too complicated to recount in full here. Its legal importance, amongst others, is that, for the first time, as far as I know, the South African Court found a defamatory article to be true, but not in the public interest. It also illustrates a broad scope of other media law principles.

The publication of Suliman's photograph contravened Section 69 of the Police Services Act. From time to time, government will pass statutes to regulate publication. It may have diverse reasons for wishing to limit the freedom to publish. On one hand, there is the desire to protect the state structure and, on the other, the wish to protect individual citizens. At the last count more than 100 statutes of parliament existed, regulating the publication or disclosure of information, sometimes carrying a criminal penalty. It is hardly possible for journalists to know all these statutes. However, they should strive to understand the principles behind the laws. The following is a broad guideline:

- If a child is under the age of 18 and a news report could potentially harm the child, there is likely to be a law against the publication. The identities of children are off limits when mentioned in relation to court proceedings. It is best to let a lawyer or the court advise you when children may be identified.

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- The state sometimes protects privacy. The prohibition against the publication of the salacious details of divorce cases – although the current form of the law is likely to fail the constitutional challenge – falls into this category.
- Laws are passed to protect the administration of justice. This is where the publication of the Suliman photograph fits in. The reason for the section is that the publication could jeopardise an identity parade. It does not relate to privacy, as some would suggest.
- The constitutional right to freedom of expression can be overridden by the state if it is in the interests of national security. The Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Act, 1993, for example, gives the state the right to withhold information if the relevant minister deems it in the interest of the country.
- The interests of the tax-collection system implemented by government are usually protected by statute. Therefore it is unlawful to publish the private tax disclosures made to the Revenue Services by taxpayers.

In Suliman's case, the identity parade went out the back door when the SABC published, so the *Cape Times* was safe on that score. In his claim against the *Cape Times* little turned on this issue, but on the question of reasonable publication, it can be asked whether it was reasonable to break the law.

Suliman's claim was based on what we in the legal business call 'common law'. It involved the law of defamation, the greatest legal risk for journalists from a financial point of view.

A defamation action follows the publication of a statement concerning another person, which has the effect of injuring that person in his or her reputation. Clearly Suliman's reputation was injured by the publication. However, it was true that he was arrested and it was true that the police suspected he was the bomber.

Journalists will often argue that 'it can't be defamatory, because it is true'. That is wrong. It remains defamatory; the truth (and public interest in the publication thereof) is only a defence. It is for the journalist to prove that the publication was lawful. There are currently four known defences of lawful publication:

- That the publication of the defamatory material was true and in the public interest (truth and public benefit).

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- The publication was subject to qualified privilege (the privilege is lost if the publication is improperly motivated); court reporting falls under this category.
- The defamatory statement was fair comment. A couple of years ago, a newspaper art critic recounted his experience at the exhibition held by an artist as akin to 'listening to lift music under the influence of Valium'. That was his belief and therefore fair comment.
- In 1998 the Supreme Court of Appeal added the defence of 'reasonable publication' – the so-called Bogoshi defence, named after the plaintiff in the case. Our courts have not yet had enough time to build a set of precedents that would give clear guidance on the meaning of reasonable publication. An example of what the court had in mind would be a case where a senior police spokesperson gives information to the media for publication and it later turns out to be false. It would probably be reasonable for the press to have published the information.

The publication of Suliman's name and picture defamed him. The article was found to be true, but the court said it was not in the public interest to know who he was and what he looked like. It was only in the public interest to know that a suspect had been arrested. The same story, without the name and picture, would have been fine.

The journalist who remembers the principles behind freedom of expression and that the freedom exists in the context of other rights... will enjoy and succeed in the relationship with the law.

So where do the stories of Gool and Suliman leave the journalist who is faced by the law that has in the past been described as a brooding omnipotence in the sky, contained in a plethora of rules, statutes, common laws (some dating back centuries), regulations and the many other sources that lawyers seemed to have assembled over the years? In both the statutory and common laws the answer lies in understanding the principles behind the rules.

The subject of freedom of expression takes up many volumes in our law reports and legal manuscripts. The journalist who remembers the principles behind freedom of expression and that the freedom exists in the context of other rights, such as human dignity, privacy, freedom of religion and belief and equality, will enjoy and succeed in the relationship with the law. To

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understand that when one or more of these rights may conflict with freedom of expression the legal convictions of society will determine which one weighs more. It comes down to having a logical sense of right and wrong.

Over and above understanding the principles, there are some universal rules to remember:

- The law will not condone the publication of mere speculation or rumour. A media boss once told a journalist from another company that he had heard the Minister of Sport say that rugby boss, Louis Luyt, had used his influence to have someone deported. The newspaper published and Luyt sued. The rumour was false – an expensive mistake.
- It is difficult to prove the facts if the source of the information is not prepared to testify. If you plan to protect the source, get supporting evidence.
- Every allegation in an article must be substantiated. If the statement 'So-and-So has been arrested on suspicion of murder' is published, and it turns out that the police only questioned So-and-So, the allegation of the arrest is false and, unless you can then prove that So-and-So committed the murder, the publisher will pay.
- Never try to hide behind the word 'alleged'. It does not help much if the meaning of the statement remains defamatory. The statement, 'Mr X has beaten his wife', tells the reader that Mr X did the foul deed. By changing it to 'Mr X has allegedly beaten his wife', the reader will interpret it that someone accused Mr X and he is probably or possibly guilty. Before publishing, ask yourself: 'What will the person who receives the information believe the words to mean?' This includes reading between the lines.
- If you publish a statement made by another, you must still prove the truth of the content of the statement, not merely the fact that the other person made the statement.
- Single sources, without verification, should be treated with circumspection.
- An article can be rendered defamatory by the inclusion of a headline, or caption under a photograph, or by the inclusion of an introductory paragraph by a subeditor.
- If the journalist has not done everything reasonably possible to establish the truth of an article, including asking the person whose reputation is being attacked, it is not likely to be viewed as reasonable conduct.

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Applying these rules will protect the journalist in most instances.

I am privileged to have known journalists over the years who have applied the principles of vigilance, while at the same time testing the seams of the legal straightjacket. They are the ones who have a sense based on logic. Over the years they have learnt to know much of the actual law, from having asked the right questions at the right times. They have also saved their publishers from paying enormous damages. The scope of these savings cannot be quantified. Being legally aware will take you a long way down the road to achieving such excellence.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Why ethics matter

George Claassen

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When Thomas Jefferson once lectured an editor on how he could improve his product, he made the following devastating observation of journalism as a profession: 'You can reform yourself by dividing your newspaper into four chapters, headed: truths, probabilities, possibilities, and lies. The first chapter would be the shortest' (Hausman 1992: 42).

Although Jefferson's judgment was harsh and must be seen in the context of its time, when journalism was a very young profession, the fact remains that journalists have become, despite their role as watchdogs against corruption and political mismanagement, in the eyes of many people, nothing more than voyeurs peeping into the private lives of the public.

For many years journalism has, unfortunately, only given attention to good writing, good reporting, good photography and good editing, but neglected the importance of the link between excellent journalism and ethical journalism (Black et al. 1999: 2).

For many years media organisations did not have guidelines on ethics, a situation that only started changing in the second part of the 20th century when

criticism about the lack of transparency and accountability at newspapers and other media brought a new awareness of the importance of ethical journalism.

From watchdog to mad dog

The important watchdog function of the media has led to some of the most outstanding examples of why any young person should strive to follow a career in journalism. President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 because of the Watergate Scandal can mostly be ascribed to the excellent and persistent reporting by two young reporters of *The Washington Post*, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein (Bernstein & Woodward 1974). And in South Africa the investigative skills of reporters such as Kitt Katzin of *The Sunday Express* and Mervyn Rees and Chris Day of *The Rand Daily Mail* opened up the can of worms of the Information Scandal, also known as Muldergate. It led to the resignation of the minister of information, Dr Connie Mulder, and, eventually in 1979, the fall of BJ Vorster as state president (Rees & Day 1980). Similarly, the dedication of investigative reporters at newspapers such as *The Weekly Mail* (and later *The Mail & Guardian*) and *Vrye Weekblad* exposed the horrible realities of the apartheid hit squads of the 1980s and 1990s (Switzer & Adhikari 2000).

Yet the fall from grace was swift. In 1980 the fame *The Washington Post* obtained for its reporting on Watergate was tarnished when one of its reporters, Janet Cooke, handed back her Pulitzer prize after it was discovered she had invented a story about 'little Jimmy', an alleged eight-year-old heroin addict in Washington (DeFleur & Dennis 1998: 541).

Intense analysis of the media's invasive role in society followed the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997. The paparazzi phenomenon of the rich and famous being haunted by photographers with long lenses has led to the question of whether the public is able to distinguish between the tabloids and the mainstream media, or the lines have become blurred (Black et al. 1999: 1). The public accused the media in general of hunting celebrities like mad dogs and made no distinction between serious newspapers adhering to ethical guidelines and supermarket tabloids such as *The National Enquirer* and its British stylistic equals *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror.*

Yet recent examples at the mainstream press in America and also in South Africa have shown that the ethical standards of journalism are under siege.

In 2003 a promising 25-year-old journalist at the prestigious 90-year-old magazine *The New Republic* was fired after manufacturing numerous stories over the years. 'I loved the electricity of people liking my stories. I loved

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going to story conference meetings and telling people what my story was going to be, and seeing the room excited. I wanted every story to be a home run,' Glass told CBS News in August 2003 (Kroft 2003). 'My life was one very long process of lying and lying again, to figure out how to cover those other lies… Like a stock graph, there's going to be exceptions in this. But the general trend of the stories is that they started out with a few madeup details and quotes. And granted a few too many, of course. But a few. And then they progressed into stories that were completely fabricated. Just completely made up out of whole cloth.'

Another bastion of quality journalism, *The New York Times*, fell foul of one of its journalists being a plagiarist and story-manufacturer in 2003 when Jayson Blair's unethical behaviour eventually led to the resignation of two top editors. *The Times* called the Blair scandal the low point in the 152-year history of the newspaper (Boehlert 2003).

And in April 2004 the foreign correspondent of America's largest circulation national daily newspaper, *USA Today*, was found guilty by an independent panel of plagiarising numerous stories. Jack Kelley resigned, but the editor also had to vacate her post.

South Africa, like other countries, has not been exempt from unethical behaviour by its journalists. In 2003 a senior political editor at the *Sunday Times*, the country's largest newspaper, was fired following her leaking of a story to its competitor, *City Press*. Ranjeni Munusamy's editor at the *Sunday Times*, Mathatha Tsedu, refused to publish her report on allegations that the Senior Director: Public Prosecutions, Bulelani Ngcuka, was a spy for the apartheid government. Also in 2003 one of the country's leading columnists, who had been awarded the Mondi prize for excellence in journalism, was exposed by a student intern working at a Johannesburg newspaper as being a plagiarist. Darrel Bristow-Bovey wrote columns for various newspapers of the Independent media group.

And in the same year the editor of *City Press*, Vusi Mona, resigned after testifying before the Hefer Commission on why he decided to publish Munusamy's report on the Ngcuka allegations.

Why media ethics?

It is clear from the few examples listed here that the media have been undergoing a crisis of confidence and that something must be done to turn around the public's perception of a media gone awry. The Mona/Munusamy/Bovey cases

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The media have been undergoing a crisis of confidence and… something must be done to turn around the public's perception of a media gone awry.

in South Africa and the Cooke/Glass/Blair/Kelley incidents in America, as well as the resignation of Piers Morgan, editor of the *Daily Mirror* in the UK (because he published digitally manipulated pictures of British soldiers allegedly abusing Iraqi prisoners) are just a few of the reasons why the media have lost a lot of credibility with the public.

'Media ethics is not an exercise for the elite. In fact, *everything* that a journalist does has ethical dimensions, to a lesser or greater degree,' writes Johan Retief in the first book on media ethics in South Africa (Retief 2002: 4). 'It is certainly not only editors who take those big ethical decisions to publish or not to publish. In fact, even minor journalistic exercises have ethical implications. Why? Because everything a journalist writes or says, or neglects to write or to say, in some or other way has an *influence* on people.'

The psychiatrist Erik Erikson draws no distinction between personal, professional and political ethics. To Erikson, 'there is no moral distinction between what you do as a journalist and what you do as a human being' (Altschull 1990: 359).

The word 'ethics' is based on the Greek word *ethos*, referring to character. Journalists have to make ethical choices, for example: where does someone's privacy begin and where does it end? In general, *ethics* deals with the philosophical foundations of decision making, or choosing among the good and bad options that one faces. *Morality*, on the other hand, comes from the Latin *mores*, and refers to the way or manner in which people behave. Thus *morality* has come to mean socially approved customs, or the *practice* or application of ethics. (One easy way to remember the distinction, according to a philosopher with a sense of humor, is to think of ethics as behaviour that occurs above the neck, and morality as behaviour that occurs below the neck!) (Black & Bryant 1995: 540).

On 11 June 2003, shortly after the Jayson Blair scandal became known, David Broder, one of America's most respected column writers and journalists and a winner of the Pulitzer prize, warned in a column in *The Washington Post* against the arrogance of the press. In 'The perils of press arrogance' he wrote many a true word that should be taken seriously by every junior and senior journalist and every editor: 'If *The Times*' leadership is wise, it will recognise this institutional disaster for what it is and reflect on the culture that produced it. *It will not simply change editors but change attitudes.* The besetting

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sin of big-time journalism is arrogance – the belief in our own omniscience, that we know so much we don't have to listen to criticism.' (Italics are mine.)

Journalists should take cognisance of media ethical questions and act ethically in their reporting, mainly for three reasons: to be transparent, to obtain and keep credibility, and to be accountable (responsible). The media ethicist Louis Day mentions the following goals as to why a study of media ethics should be part and parcel of the training of young journalists:

- *Stimulating the moral imagination*. 'Stimulating the moral imagination develops an emotional empathy with others that is not elicited by discussing ethical issues in abstract terms' (Day 1991: 7). In training sessions where case studies are discussed, this type of moral stimulation can enhance the quality of decision-making by journalists and editors, whether it is in the choice of a headline, a picture or selection of news.
- *Recognising ethical issues.* 'Anticipation of possible dilemmas is an important objective of ethics training and the moral reasoning process' (Day 1991: 7). One way to avoid ethical problems is for media institutions to discuss in-depth all borderline cases *prior* to publication. In this sense, a guideline or ethical code of conduct is essential at any media organisation. The concept of an ombudsman acting as a channel through which readers, listeners and viewers can make their complaints known is also a way of recognising ethical issues, as well as the willingness to recognise, admit and apologise for mistakes.
- *Developing analytical skills.* Louis Day emphasises the importance of rational decision-making that is 'based on a defensible moral foundation, ample deliberation, and consideration of the available options' (Day 1991: 8). Again the role of an ethical code of conduct to which journalists and editors can refer is of the utmost importance in a critical decision-making process.
- *Eliciting a sense of moral obligation and personal responsibility.* 'As moral agents, journalists are accountable for their own actions. Journalism involves responsibility – and that responsibility cannot be delegated' (Retief 2002: 6). Accountability means to be 'answerable and liable to be called for an accounting… The concept of accountability as we use it assumes responsibility of the sort captured by the expression "the buck stops here". The person owes an account in the form of a clarification, explanation, or justification. Any valid account generally entails a relevant and justifiable explanation of one's actions given to someone to whom it is legitimately owed' (Klaidman & Beauchamp 1987: 211–212). According to

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Day, the media often emphasise freedom at the expense of responsibility. 'A course in ethics can redress that imbalance' (Day 1991: 8).

- *Tolerating disagreement*. Retief points out the importance of tolerance of differences 'and not to automatically label opposite points of view as immoral' (Retief 2002: 6). Respect of other points of view is part of the ethical process (Day 1991: 8), also reflected in the *audi alteram partem* rule ('the other side must be heard') that is a prerequisite for balanced reporting.

The importance of ethical codes or guidelines of conduct

Media ethics have advanced since the first known journalistic code was developed in 1910 by the Kansas Editorial Association (Christians et al. 1995: 36). Today media ethics centre mainly on three major issues: *accuracy* and *fairness* in reporting and photojournalism; the *behaviour of reporters*, especially in relation to their sources; and avoidance of *conflicts of interest* (DeFleur & Dennis 1998: 541). In South Africa most news organisations have an ethical code of conduct, and although these codes differ, these three areas are emphasised in all of them. They are all incorporated in the four main guidelines of the codes of conduct of the American Society of Professional Journalists, the code of conduct of *Die Burger* (South Africa's largest circulation Afrikaans daily newspaper), the seven main guidelines of the code of conduct of the South African Press Ombudsman, and numerous other ethical media codes of conduct. The four main pillars on which these codes rest, are:

- *Seek truth and report it*. Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.
- *Minimise harm*. Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.
- *Act independently*. Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.
- *Be accountable.* Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other (Black et al. 1999: 6–8).

According to Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, journalists fulfil the role of gatekeepers while there are no fences linked to the gates. Rumours graze all over the place because they slip past the gates. An ethical code plays the role of fence to prevent this (Rosenstiel 2004).

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The role of the news ombudsman

The first newspaper ombudsman in the US was appointed in June 1967 in Louisville, Kentucky, to serve readers of *The Courier-Journal* and *The Louisville Times*. The first Canadian appointment – at *The Toronto Star* – was in 1972. The concept was in place much earlier in Japan. The *Asahi Shimbun* in Tokyo established a committee in 1922 to receive and investigate reader complaints. Another mass-circulation Tokyo paper, the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, set up a staff committee in 1938 to monitor the paper's quality. In 1951 this group became an ombudsman committee, which today hears reader complaints about the paper and meets daily with editors. News ombudsmen today are found throughout North and South America, Europe, and parts of the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Yet it remains a slow process and in 2003 only four per cent of newspapers in the USA used an ombudsman system to address communication with readers (Franklin 2003: 9). In South Africa the situation is not much better. The establishment of the Organisation of News Ombudsmen (ONO) has started changing this situation because news organisations have become more aware of the need for an ombudsman. According to ONO, a news ombudsman is someone who receives and investigates complaints from newspaper readers or listeners or viewers of radio and television stations about accuracy, fairness, balance and good taste in news coverage. He or she recommends appropriate remedies or responses to correct or clarify news reports.

Why should a newspaper or broadcaster have an ombudsman?

- To improve the quality of news reporting by monitoring accuracy, fairness and balance.
- To help his or her news provider to become more accessible and accountable to readers or audience members and, thus, to become more credible.
- To increase the awareness of its news professionals about the public's concerns.
- To save time for publishers and senior editors, or broadcasters and news directors, by channelling complaints and other inquiries to one responsible individual.
- To resolve some complaints that might otherwise be sent to attorneys and become costly lawsuits (http://www.newsombudsmen.org/what.htm).

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The Ten Commandments for Ethical Journalism

According to Johan Retief (2002: 44–45), the following brief code of ethics can be construed from all the ethical codes he studied:

> Preamble: The media shall be free because the public has a right to be informed.
> You shall therefore:
>
> 1. Be *accurate* both in text and context (and correct mistakes promptly).
> 2. Be *truthful*, only using deceptive methods in matters of public importance if there is no other way of uncovering the facts.
> 3. Be *fair*, presenting all relevant facts in a balanced way.
> 4. Be *duly impartial* in reporting the news and when commenting on it.
> 5. *Protect confidential sources*, unless it is of overriding public interest to do otherwise.
> 6. Be *free from obligation* to any interest group.
> 7. *Respect the privacy of individuals*, unless it is overridden by legitimate public interest.
> 8. *Not intrude into private grief and distress*, unless such intrusion is overridden by a legitimate public interest.
> 9. Refrain from any kind of *stereotyping*.
> 10. Be *socially responsible* in referring to matters of indecency, obscenity, violence, brutality, blasphemy and sex.

Media ethics is important because the media need to regain their credibility. Aly Colón, editor of *The Poynter Report*, uses a journalistic interpretation of St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 13, with regard to the three most important virtues: faith, hope and love. And that if we have everything else but love, we have nothing. Colón's journalistic version of St Paul's letter reads thus:

> *If I can write like the best writer in the news business, or edit like the best editor, or gather news like the best reporter of news, but do not have credibility, I have nothing; I am a clanging cymbal, a noisy gong.* (Colón 2003: 4)

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The art of cartooning

Jonathan Shapiro

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Recently, a parking attendant recognised me when I wrote my name in his register. 'You're Zapiro? I thought you'd have bigger muscles!' I asked him why and he said, 'Because you're so cheeky, you need big muscles when the big politicians get mad at you!'

Readers value the licence we have as editorial cartoonists to confront the most powerful people in society and knock them off their pedestals. It's a bit like the licence the court jester once had to say things about the king that nobody else would dare to say.

How much freedom cartoonists have to criticise in any given country has been called a litmus test for democracy. Oppressive regimes don't readily tolerate satire, and censorship or worse is the order of the day. Cartoonists under oppression have tried bravely to get their message across but the risks have been great. Cartoonists have been assassinated, assaulted, jailed, deported. Apartheid-era South Africa was extremely intolerant of dissent. Promotion of banned organisations was prohibited, censorship was everywhere and some newspapers were banned (Figure i). Cartoonists in mainstream newspapers

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Figure (i) *Save the Press* 1.6.88

were able to criticise government to an extent, but while some were excellent at their craft, few dared to be really subversive. In the alternative press things were even more difficult. Cartoons and the publications themselves were often banned. A student publication once carried a cartoon depicting a little boy looking down a toilet and saying, 'Excuse me, are you the Prime Minister?' The artist, Franco Frescura, an Italian citizen, was promptly deported.

In my own experience, a cartoon poster I did in late '86 for the United Democratic Front was regarded by the authorities as subversive and the security police came looking for me. I had to go into hiding and emerged a couple of weeks later in disguise, which I kept up for about three months. The poster was banned. In mid-1988 the security police finally did get me in their clutches, arriving at my home at 3am and detaining me without trial. My detention appeared to be due to other activism I was involved in but the security police hadn't forgotten the UDF poster and the first thing they asked me in my interrogation was, 'Why do you draw us as pigs?' to which I replied with some bravado, 'I draw what I see.'

Democracies are generally more tolerant of satire and in post-apartheid South Africa, press freedom flourishes (Figure ii). But, as in other democracies, there are still restrictions to freedom of the press, though they are usually more subtle. Corporate interests can influence what newspapers are prepared to publish. As the big media groups swallow up more and more newspapers, media ownership becomes a constraint to a cartoonist. When I tried in the mid-90s to do a cartoon lampooning a public figure implicated in financial skullduggery,

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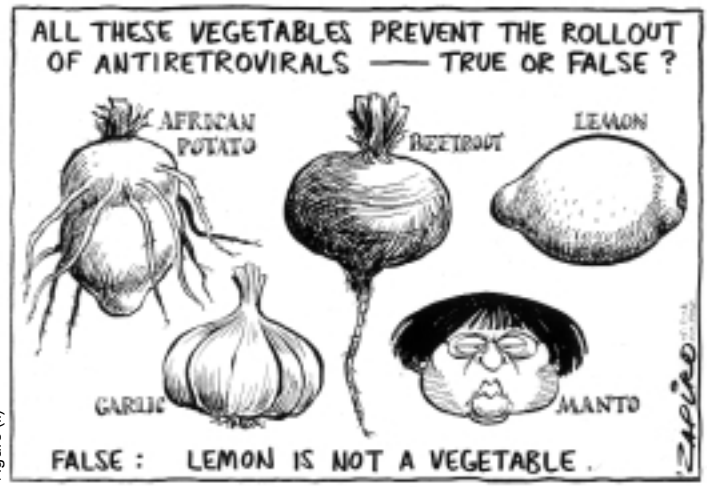

Figure (ii) *Sunday Times* 15.2.04

I was blocked by the editor because the public figure happened to be a director of the company that owned the newspaper. I fought hard to publish the cartoon but I lost and it never saw the light of day.

Editors are wary too of cartoons using corporate brands, even when the company name or logo is used merely as a device to satirise something entirely separate. This is because companies may sue for loss of brand integrity if they see their product being used in any way they don't like. The T-shirt company Laugh-It-Off has been hit with lawsuits for exactly this reason. Even under our progressive constitution, religious and sexual taboos continue to constrain what editors are prepared to publish, though the newspapers for which I've worked over the past decade have allowed me the freedom to publish cartoons some readers consider religiously or sexually offensive (Figure iii).

Figure (iii) *Sowetan* 23.9.96

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A good cartoonist is motivated by moral outrage, is prepared to attack powerful people and knock them off their pedestals, and thinks nothing of taking on the establishment, taking risks and espousing unpopular views. A cartoonist should have a passion for politics, hold strong opinions, have an ability to read between the lines and to think laterally, a sense of the absurd, some talent for drawing and especially for caricature, and be able to work under the extreme pressure of daily deadlines.

Figure (iv)

Mail & Guardian 11.7.02

Cartoonists tend to criticise and ridicule their subjects. It's easier to do a vicious satirical cartoon than one that offers a considered, balanced view (Figure iv). It's easier to be negative than positive. Some internationally famous cartoonists go as far as to belittle the notion of doing positive cartoons that are in favour of something. I don't entirely agree with this attitude. In post-apartheid South Africa, with icons like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, there's a lot to be positive about, even as a cartoonist. In fact I've found it a challenge to explore the dilemmas and dichotomies of the new order, resulting in cartoons that empathise with the protagonist as he or she grapples with difficult choices (Figures v and vi). While I would never see myself as a praise-singer, I don't believe every cartoon needs to be a political assassination. While

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Figure (v) *Sowetan* 27.5.97

Figure (vi) *Sowetan* 24.5.00

maintaining a healthy scepticism, I would never want to become an all-out cynic and if ever I do become cynical about everything, that's when I'll change jobs.

A major challenge for me, working as I do in three very different newspapers, has been to find metaphors and scenarios that speak to readers

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Figure (vii) *Mail & Guardian* 11.8.94

across the board, across cultural and racial divides (Figure vii). South Africa is still unpicking the threads of apartheid and frames of reference in different sectors of the population differ widely.

A cartoon works effectively when the reader understands the metaphors and scenarios used, whether they're drawn from literature, the Bible, myths and legends or popular culture.

A cartoon takes just a few seconds to read and absorb but it can have enormous impact and be highly memorable (Figure viii).

Figure (viii) *Sowetan* 8.9.97

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Cartoons expose people's faults and foibles, exaggerating them for effect and pinpointing contradictions between what people say and what they actually do. Almost every reader of a newspaper reads the cartoon, not just for a laugh but to see a strong, well-communicated idea. A cartoonist's job is to make people think, often by making them laugh, though not all cartoons are meant to be funny. Some evoke anger, some sadness. The main thing is to make an incisive comment using whatever devices will help. I feel I'm 80 per cent journalist and 20 per cent artist, that the head is more important than the hand. A good idea can survive being drawn badly but a great drawing can't carry a weak idea.

Figure (ix)

Sowetan 5.9.00

A good tip for a budding cartoonist: don't try to do too much in one drawing. A single well-communicated idea is invariably better than a set of complicated ideas (Figure ix). Most beginner cartoonists try to put everything they'd like to say about a particular issue into a single cartoon. The result is a confusing, diluted cartoon that doesn't hold the reader's attention. I learnt this to my cost when I did my first cartoon for the *Mail & Guardian* in 1994. I wasn't a complete novice but, overawed by the occasion, I did a cartoon that tried to cover all bases and ended up with the whole being far less than the sum of its parts. I realised then that conceptual clarity without over-elaboration is best.

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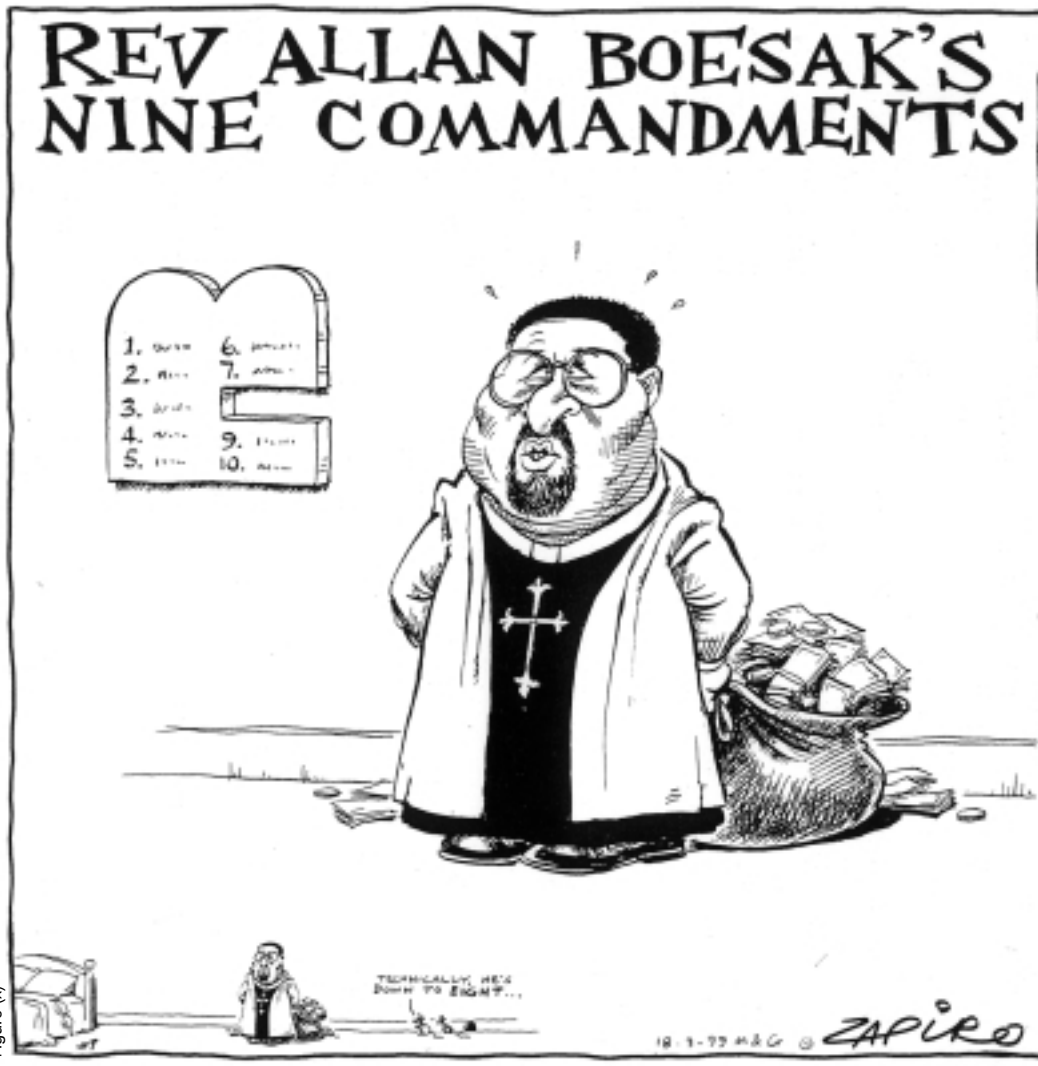

Figure (x)

Mail & Guardian 18.3.99

Having said that, occasionally I do add 'asides' in the form of comments or in-jokes, drawn small-scale (Figure x). What's important when you use this device, however, is to make sure that these 'asides' do not detract from the main message of the cartoon. They should be adding something to the main message, a detail which adds a subtle but mordant little twist of the knife.

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When thinking about how I'm going to make a point in a cartoon, I've found it useful to differentiate between cartoons that are 'conceptual' and 'sitcom' cartoons. For me, a conceptual cartoon usually makes its point using a visual metaphor where an issue or a person is shown as something else (Figure xi). A powerful visual metaphor is capable of carrying multiple meanings very succinctly.

Figure (xi) *Mail & Guardian* 4.2.00

Figure (xii) *Weekly Mail* published 1986

In the 1980s when PW Botha was in the habit of wagging his finger belligerently at the liberation movement and at the world, I did a number of conceptual cartoons where his finger became the symbol for the repressive authority of the state (Figure xii). The finger became a smoking gun or a giant statue or I switched the index finger with the middle finger to show his contempt for the world.

A 'sitcom' cartoon portrays an interaction between characters in what appears to be a relatively naturalistic scenario (Figure xiii). I call it 'sitcom' because people are familiar with situation comedies on television. The characters and their surroundings are shown in realistic scale and the joke or comment is made through dialogue or a relatively restrained visual twist.

Figure (xiii) *Mail & Guardian* 11.7.96

Categorising cartoons into 'conceptual' and 'sitcom' is just a way to help one think clearly. These two broad categories are not always completely distinct from each other and some cartoons combine aspects of both.

Editorial cartoons are most often drawn in a single frame or panel, encapsulating an issue in one 'take', but cartoons can also be drawn in more than one panel. Multiple panels are used either to enumerate a series of ideas (Figure xiv) or to produce an editorial cartoon in classic comic-strip form, where the break between panels represents the passing of time. It's important for an aspirant cartoonist to understand how comic strips work as this method can be the best way to nail a specific point (Figure xv). As in other forms of joke telling, timing becomes important here. An understanding of comics can also help a cartoonist make the reader absorb the message in a coherent way (Figure xvi). Comics are read from left to right and from top to bottom, and so to a great extent are editorial cartoons, which informs the way dialogue balloons should be placed in a single panel. Beginner cartoonists often subvert a good idea by placing dialogue balloons in positions where the reader will read them in the wrong order.

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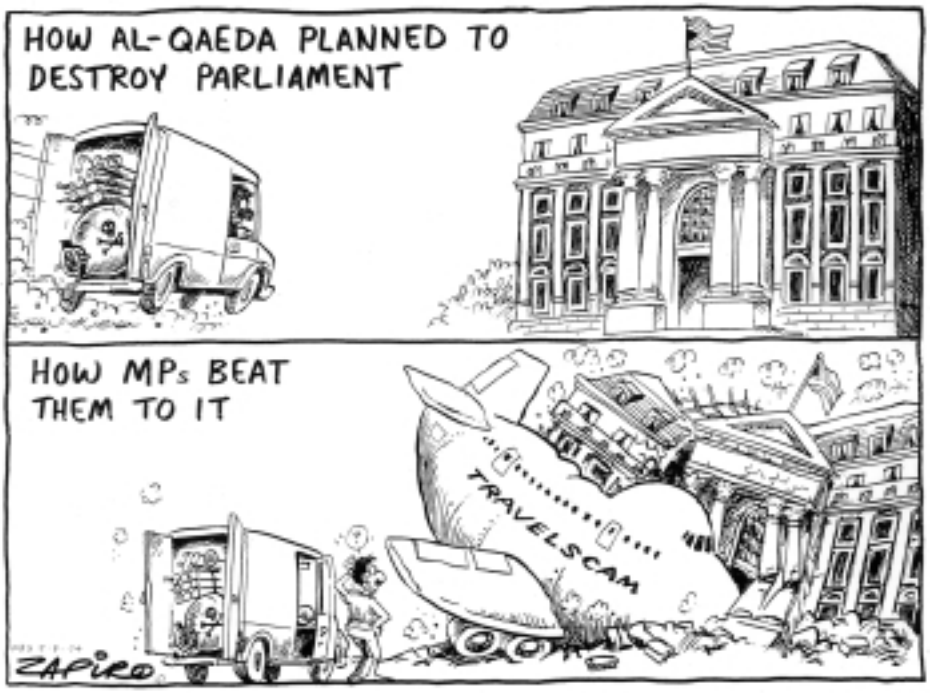

Figure (xiv) *Mail & Guardian* 5.8.04

Figure (xv) *Sowetan* 19.2.96

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Figure (xvi) *Sowetan* 16.5.01

Caricature is a potent weapon in a cartoonist's armoury. Identifying and exaggerating facial features is used to identify personalities, even to the extent of reducing them to a few simple elements. A diagonal black fringe and small square moustache is still enough to represent Hitler, half a century after his death. But not everyone has a face that's easy to caricature and it can take more than one shot at an individual before you feel you've got it right.

Figure (xvii) *Sunday Times* 26.1.03

Prominent public figures seem to 'grow into' their caricatures as a number of cartoonists keep drawing them and keep on refining their features. Take George W Bush: he doesn't have extremely prominent features, he's not bald and he's clean-shaven. Some early versions of him were fairly nondescript but then cartoonists began emphasising his ears (which are not particularly large), his flared nostrils and the shape of his upper lip. He's been transformed from an ordinary-looking guy to the bat-eared, wing-lipped, button-eyed persona we know so well (Figure xvii).

Public figures who wear signature clothing are a gift to cartoonists: Archbishop Tutu in his robe, Frene Ginwala in her sari, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in her hats, Eugene Terre Blanche in his neo-Nazi outfit. However cartoonists can also develop the caricature of a person around clothing that doesn't exist in reality and is a representation of someone's personality. When Marthinus van Schalkwyk took over the New National Party, someone said he was inexperienced and still wearing short pants (kortbroek). Since then he's become known as 'Kortbroek', which inevitably led to his cartoon persona almost always wearing short pants (Figure xviii).

Figure (xviii)

Mail & Guardian 28.5.98

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In many newspapers, cartoonists used to be part of the editorial staff, advantages being that the cartoonist could sit in on editorial conferences and also receive the financial benefits and security offered by fixed employment. These days the trend is for cartoonists to work as freelancers or on retainer, where the advantages are a greater degree of independence and the possibility of working for more than one publication. The downside is that being out of the newsroom can lead to a degree of isolation, so an extra effort is required to keep in touch with events and to have a network of sharp minds with whom you can consult (Figure xix). Being freelance also means that financially you're on your own, so you have to work towards earning enough to provide things like your own medical aid and retirement package.

Figure (xix) *Sowetan* 9.7.99

If you're aspiring to be an editorial cartoonist, it's best to develop a wide range of cartooning skills, as positions at newspapers are hard to come by. Even a large city has no more than a handful of newspapers and once a cartoonist has become established, he or she is likely to stay in the position for a long time. There are many other avenues to explore, including doing cartoons, caricatures, illustrations and comic strips for student publications, small local newspapers and magazines. Learning to write won't hurt either. Getting the text or dialogue just right in a cartoon takes a lot of fine-tuning.

The good news is that a number of new newspapers have recently been published and dynamic young cartoonists have been given a golden opportunity.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Designing stories

David Hazelhurst

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A camel, the saying goes, is a horse designed by a committee. It isn't. If it were, art, marketing and sales directors would have created a beautiful thoroughbred – dying of thirst as its dainty hooves sank into the sand. You would have been stuck in the middle of the desert and, if you survived, you wouldn't buy another one.

No, a camel was designed by someone who knew exactly what a camel must be: a big-footed beast of burden that can carry on for days without water and food. The content, not the look, of the camel is king. And so it should be with newspapers.

Too often we sacrifice substance for illusion, and this is written in the hope that both young designers and editors will see there are new and exciting ways to overcome the traps we have laid for ourselves.

The fault is that most layout is done in isolation. The first time the layout subeditor knows about a major story is when she is told to put it on a page. She wastes time figuring what the story is all about; the reporter wastes time

writing copy that has to be slashed; the copy subeditor wastes time cutting long stories to a few paras; the photographer takes pictures that are pointless; and all the energy that should be spent on creativity is wasted on fixing.

Contrast that scenario with designing stories. This isn't about drawing pretty pictures, the layout of a page, the typography, the size or flavour of your headlines, or your use of colour and pictures.

This is about living with the story from the start, helping design the content, the words, the visuals, the headlines and, finally, the projection.

The page is the destination; the journey the exciting challenge that makes it all possible. Muhammad Ali puts it this way:

I run on the road

Long before I dance under the lights.

The lights are the layout, dazzling maybe, but there only to show off the dance.

Never forget that.

I am lucky, thanks to experience, to opportunity, and to working with great reporters, news editors, photographers, graphic artists and subeditors.

Running on that long road has been a great joy and if, at the end, there is some dancing under the lights it is a shared pride born out of a shared passion and quest for excellence.

Running on that long road has been a great joy and if, at the end, there is some dancing under the lights it is a shared pride born out of a shared passion and quest for excellence.

This chapter is written to give those who want to design an insight into how the process works and in the hope you will be inspired to run down that road, welcome the challenges, and think differently and more creatively about newspapers.

We all face formidable competition, not only from other newspapers, but from radio, TV and online news sources, and we cannot carry on as if we are still kings of the road.

The Star newspaper trades in South Africa's most competitive print media market, with the *Sowetan*, *Business Day*, the *Daily Sun*, *Beeld* and *The Citizen* all nibbling away at bits of our readership.

We face another burden. Those who buy our overnight editions read us many hours after the stories are written and processed, and many hours after radio and TV news broadcasts. And worse: although most of our first-edition papers are bought in the morning, they are read only in the afternoon.

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So not only do we have to be better, but different, and demonstrably different, both in content and design. And we dare not dish up yesterday's news as though it's just happened.

Let's go to the starting line: that's knowing your reader. There is nothing more important. Your reader sets the tone for everything: the stories you choose to chase; the way you tackle them; how they are written; where they are placed; and finally the way they are headlined and projected.

That's my job.

How do we go about it? *The Star* has adopted the concept of WED (Writing, Editing and Design). It's the most exciting and rewarding concept in newspapers, and one that produces some of our most sparkling pages, both in content and design.

What is WED? We bring together a news editor, the writers, photographers, graphic artists and designers to plan the story. We get a working headline, or title, so that everyone is clear about where we want to go; we decide how to break it up, what sidebars, comment, explanation and advice are needed; we decide how to illustrate it. And we agree with the writers how long each story should be.

The effect is remarkable. Compartments disappear. Suddenly you find a photographer suggesting a headline, the designer an intro or a sidebar, the writer a photograph. Suddenly everyone is taking equal ownership of everything and the various talents multiply to produce a page that is far greater than a sum of the parts.

The drawbacks? Only one: resistance from people who say, 'I don't have the time for a WED conference'.

Do you know the story of the woodcutter? He is trying to chop up a pile of logs with an axe so blunt it hardly makes a dent in the wood. A woman who has been watching him eventually says: 'Why don't you sharpen your axe?'

His reply: 'I don't have the time'.

Clearly no designer can be involved with every story, and not every story needs this treatment. But certainly the big ones, the ones that really make the difference, need a designer from start to finish.

The best way to explain my job is to give examples of stories in which I was involved from conception to execution. The subjects are diverse, but the thread is common: how a designer can shape and generate ideas and weld the words, visuals, headlines and layout into memorable pages.

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Case Study 1: A night of horror

On the night of 11 April 2001, 43 soccer fans were killed in a stampede at Ellis Park. I saw the tragedy on TV at home, was in the office 15 minutes later, and helped guide the story from the beginning.

The main problem: by the time readers bought *The Star* the next day most would know 43 people had been killed and we couldn't lead with a headline: 43 KILLED IN SOCCER STAMPEDE.

How then to project it? We had less than two hours to put together this mammoth story (we devoted seven pages to it); we gathered eyewitness accounts from furious and hysterical fans; we spoke to as many ducking and diving officials as we could; our reporters at the game gave their versions and it became clear – there had been gross negligence and this was the angle.

I wrote a headline to emphasise the many unanswered questions: WHY? WHY? WHY? The rest of the page almost designed itself. I had a prize-winning picture (a father kneeling next to his daughter over the body of his son); a riveting lead telling what had happened; and a beautifully written colour story.

The white type on black emphasised the tragedy and we signalled its importance with the yellow SOCCER HORROR SPECIAL tag next to the masthead and cross-references to all the inside pages.

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SOCCER HORROR SPECIAL

The Star

THURSDAY APRIL 12 2001 R2.50 (inc VAT) (R3.20 outside Gauteng) Annual subscription: R217 (excl. VAT)

■ PAGE 2: Mbeki calls for top-level inquiry
Eyewitnesses tell of how the horror happened
■ PAGE 3: Uncle gives his life to save child
■ PAGE 4: Crushed by a human wave – the tragedy in pictures
■ PAGE 15: World soccer disasters

WHY? WHY? WHY?

Distraught ... unnamed soccer spectators cry in the aftermath of the disaster. Picture: Kim Ludbrook

Fury of the fans as 43 die in soccer's worst night

By Mark Gevisser, Thembisa Fakude and Jason Norman

Why was this allowed to happen? As South Africa's biggest-ever soccer tragedy unfolded, fevered questions were being asked last night. Dark questions were already being asked about the chaos that killed 43 people during the Rainbow Chiefs-Orlando Pirates derby.

Fear of the 37 injured still in hospital today ran to a crescendo as the questions mounted.

Questions are being asked this morning about how this tragedy happened, with many of the fans criticising inadequate policing and slow ambulance and fire brigade services.

Last night, fans accused the authorities of not managing the sale of the tickets. It would not have happened if the disturbed fans got in, they said.

After the match, shocked fans spoke of the horror of bodies stacked outside and inside the stadium as emergency workers and police struggled to remember some of the injured.

Eyewitnesses said at least 43 bodies were outside the stadium.

Late children searched desperately for their parents. Husbands, wives, lovers and friends organised lists, and hired cars frantically tried to find them in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Eyewitness Mabena interviewed: "I was hit by a body of people and fainted on. When I came to I could not find my wife. ... I groped and looked for her and couldn't find her."

"My body ached and I pulled for help and then I was taken to hospital.

"I kept on looking for security guards to help me. I never saw them. When we were ... we didn't know where we were."

Michael Phiri, 1, is in good condition. He said: "The stadium was just too small, the tickets were sold out, and the security people were overwhelmed by the crowd. I have never seen anything like this in South African football."

Premier Soccer League CEO Andrew Dipela said after last night's tragedy that tickets were on sale at the stadium gate to the Carling Premiership match.

However, he refused to speculate or be drawn on what time the tickets were sold out.

"It would be wrong of me to speculate on this when the tickets were sold out," Tickets were pre-sold at Ellis Park and the Kicker Check Wings. "Both were curbed and available before the game. The gates, and ticket sales are the responsibility of the home team, which was Chiefs."

Dipela also refused to comment on why no overages were seen to calls outside a short time when the stadium sign had gone up.

"All these questions we will answer at a press conference tomorrow (Thursday)."

Two years ago, also at a game between Chiefs and Pirates at Ellis Park, a number of cars were damaged inside the stadium parking area when angry fans battled outside after the gates were locked when the stadium was full.

There was also a ruckus on the terraces afternoon, but damage was done to the stadium.

Death their reward for following the sport they loved

By Jason Norman

Lives ...

Last night, as the full extent of the tragedy that attacked the individuals to the biggest derby in South Africa became ... and Orlando Pirates v Kaizer Chiefs clash.

It didn't matter that the game was an unofficial friendly. It didn't matter that the stadium was hopelessly overcrowded, or that 20 000 fans had got in without tickets. It didn't matter that the stadium was inadequately policed, or that the stadium could not cope with the numbers ... it was ... It was just a game.

And 1 million rand ... for it ... Johannesburg. In England, or the Independent stadium in Britain and in the West Bank stadium where dozens of Chiefs and Pirates fans died ... campaign.

It was the love of the game that attracted the individuals to the biggest derby in South Africa's history ... and Orlando Pirates v Kaizer Chiefs derby.

It didn't matter that the game was an unofficial friendly. It didn't matter that the stadium was hopelessly overcrowded, or that 20 000 fans had got in without tickets. It didn't matter that the stadium was inadequately policed, or that the stadium could not cope with the numbers ... it was ... It was just a game.

And 1 million rand ... for it ... Johannesburg. In England, or the Independent stadium in Britain and in the West Bank stadium where dozens of ... Park stadium ... Utopia, the crowds were getting ... would be a very derby ... there ... Pirates ... school ... through the ... stadium ... were ... before ... pitch.

Near ... stadium ... police ... fans ... stadium ... doors ... flow ... spectators ... had been ... locked. Mother ... fans ... go ... into ... stadium ... stand ... safer ... persuasive ... them ... through.

"Whether ... stadium ... what ... of us ... go ... through ... game," ... said a security guard.

We followed, like some ... Chiefs ... fan ... We had ... tickets. Many people didn't ... tickets. As ... crowded ... stood, the ... of ... mandatory ... Some ... noticed ... gates ... the ... stadium ... the ... crowd ... to ... another ... by ... security.

Until ... the ... 43 ... the game ... a ... thrill. One ... Chiefs ... to ... pitch ... closing ... way ... back.

... about ... the ... game, ... the ... sign ... emerged. ... Chiefs ... TV ... about ... footage ... team ... fans ... watching ... scenes ... The ... fans ... Premier ... Chief ... Pirates ... interviewed ... game ... encouraged.

Chiefs ... CEO ... addressed ... We ... people ... beside ... people ... died ..."

The ... of ... has ... 100 ... pull ... least ... fans ... night. ... could ... fans ... more.

HOLIDAY STAR

■ The Star will not appear tomorrow. Good Friday. We'll be back on Saturday.

BUSINESS REPORT

MARKETS FEEL THE BOUNCE BEFORE EASTER

Case Study 2: A bullet for an unborn baby

This was the story of South Africa's youngest crime victim, Baby Courtney, who was paralysed for life when a hijacker shot her while she was still in her mother's womb. A year later chief crime reporter Gill Gifford went back to see what had happened to Courtney. We held a WED meeting and it was here the designing began.

Gill told us the bones of her investigation and the first major decision was that the story divided naturally into three parts under titles we had agreed on:

(1) A bullet for an unborn baby: The day of the shooting and the birth of Courtney while her mother was unconscious.

(2) A bundle of tubes… and beauty: The next day, when it was discovered she was paralysed.

(3) A cry… a smile… a kiss: The fightback after Courtney went home.

The second decision was to devote a page to each part. We then agreed on what information Gill still needed and what pictures and graphics would go with each part.

Over the next two weeks news editor Cecilia Russell, writing coach Franz Krüger and I worked extensively with Gill every step of the way. Gill knew exactly where she was going, we agreed on lengths and there wasn't a wasted word. And the pictures, both from the hospital and from Courtney's home, were magnificent.

The approach to the layout was: simplicity, no fireworks, no histrionics – pages that would evoke compassion and hope, not horror and anger as with Ellis Park.

The story later won both the Mondi and CNN awards for the best feature writing of the year and this is a tribute to Gill Gifford – and an emphatic endorsement of designing the story from the start.

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THE STORY OF BABY COURTNEY: SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUNGEST CRIME VICTIM

Two years ago, South Africa Courtney Ellerbeck became South Africa's youngest crime victim when she was shot by a hijacker while in her mother's womb. Today *The Star* reprints the three-part story of Courtney. It won reporter **Gill Gifford** first prize in the feature section of the prestige Mondi Paper Newspaper Awards. It is a story just as moving and uplifting now as when it was first published in July last year

By Gill Gifford

Over the past few months I have come to know Lesley Ellerbeck, her daughter Courtney and their family. Theirs is one of the most remarkable stories I have covered as The Star's chief crime reporter. It is an epic of love, hope, courage and love can triumph over disaster.

A bullet for an unborn baby

The agony ... this was the first image Lesley Ellerbeck had of Courtney. The bullet had passed through her and it was only after 3 days that doctors realised how serious it was.

Lesley Ellerbeck was seven months pregnant when a hijacker shot her and her baby. Two hours later Courtney was born. So began her ordeal

PROLOGUE

The driveway was on the door her two months and almost crushing clothes to her forearm like two sand a half years old. The hijacker was the first to see what it was. Although she was only a brilliant smile when she was about to her ...

"Dad-dad," she cried, as she became brighter and the her arms towards him. Already as she stood, smiling and rattling her blonde hair. She hugs him excitedly, but her face shrinks in confusion ...

CHAPTER 1

It was a clear summer Thursday morning and life was good for Lesley Ann Ellerbeck.

Several months before, she at twenty-six had freed herself from an unhappy relationship with a moody and aggressive boyfriend. She was back with her parents, living in Boksburg on the Rand east.

She wasn't working, but didn't mind because it gave her plenty of free time.

Almost, she was looking forward to the birth of her first child. There were two months of her pregnancy left.

The day, March 10 two years ago, began with a trip to drop her father off at work. The car needed to be taken in for work on the spare, but she decided to wait one week and her father would a brilliant smile when she was about to her ...

Lesley had close bonds with her relatives, and often enjoyed stopping by for a cup of coffee and a chat.

At about 9am Lesley was ready to leave her grandmother's suburban home, on the corner of a quiet street.

She was sitting in the white Corolla with the engine idling, ready to pull off, as she chatted to her granny. Then the hijackers struck.

Armed with guns, two men ran up to the car. One grabbed hold of the elderly grandmother and pushed her from the road. Both attackers shoved the Lesley and ordered her to get out of the car ... first.

Shocked by the suddenness of it all, Lesley hesitated to move. Her sturdy platform shoes jammed between the floor pedals and she struggled to free her. Her pregnant stomach made speed almost impossible.

Suddenly two gunshots rang out. One hijacker made a grab for the car keys, and then both bolted. They raced down the street, with their firearms, taking only the set of keys with them.

In the sudden silence, Lesley clambered out of the car, crying to work out what had just happened. She didn't realise that she had been shot in the stomach. It was her aunt, nursing wounds, who pointed to the spreading red on her white t-shirt and ordered her to sit down.

Dazed, Lesley sat on the grassy curb as blood soaked through her shirt. Her mistress phoned frantically for help.

For its long minutes, the 911 emergency number stayed engaged. They eventually got through to the Tokaroon emergency number, and screamed for an ambulance.

In the meantime, the news reached Lesley's mother, Mary Ellerbeck, a theatre sister at Airways Clinic in Benoni Park. Her reaction was immediate. She also insisted her only daughter be brought to surgery.

But waiting was impossible. A medical rep overheard what was going on and offered to drive the panic-stricken mother wherever she needed to go – an opportunity she readily took up.

At the scene of the shooting, an officiary paramedic having meeting came out to help. And soon afterwards the ambulance arrived.

Seconds later, a car pulled up and Mary climbed out, just in time to see Lesley being lifted into the back of the ambulance. She quickly jumped in alongside the attacker and set about examining her daughter.

Mary told the ambulance driver to speed up, but he refused, claiming "this isn't a matter of life or death". But she insisted that Lesley be taken to the closest clinic, where she knew and trusted the standard of care.

Inside the ambulance, there wasn't much to work with. Determined to make do, the experienced nurse set about using a sculpted to stop the blood to secure a clip in Lesley's arm. And when Lesley was suddenly sick, there wasn't a kidney bowl in sight to catch the mess.

Lesley remembered sometimes and fully aware of everything around her throughout the unbearable trip, even seeing her mum leave in every time the driver stopped at a intersection.

She tried to remain calm, but was at the same time terrified – not just for herself, but for the baby that was almost certainly also injured.

The day after ... Mary Ellerbeck comforts Lesley, who had lost consciousness when she heard Courtney's heartbeat on a monitor and had not yet seen her baby

At one point she felt her baby kick and breathed an immense sigh of relief, knowing that at least the child was alive and there was real reason for hope.

But her condition started to deteriorate. Pale, she lay in waves, and although she remained calm, she began to worry.

Her world grew cold, and she observed as tissue overwhelmed her.

When at last they reached the hospital, Lesley was rushed for emergency scans to determine exactly what damage had been done.

The second she heard her baby's heartbeat on a monitor her body gave in and she lost consciousness. She woke again only the following day.

Unconscious, Lesley was rushed into theatre where she underwent a Caesarean delivery.

Baby Courtney Faye – her name chosen long before – was born at 11.34am.

It was almost two hours after she and her mother had been shot. At only 32 weeks she was premature, and weighed in at a mere 1.6kg.

Doctors and family members hovered near at least as the tiny bundle appeared to have suffered only flesh wounds – she otherwise seemed completely fine.

Subsequent scans revealed that failed to show any other damage.

Sighs of thanks by doctors and family members resonated through the hallways of the clinic.

Mother Lesley and baby Courtney spent the next few days in intensive care.

Young Courtney's grandmother Mary was at the top to keep close eye on her girl as she continued with work as another floor of the clinic ... while making time to nip in regularly for short visits.

Lesley's brothers Robert and Spencer and her father George spent their evenings with her at the hospital, all strongly supporting the injured pair.

The family pulled together for comfort and gave everything they had to help mother and baby through the difficult time.

For the moment, it seemed miracle enough that both Lesley and Courtney had survived.

Nothing, though, had prepared them for the ordeals to come.

TOMORROW

Suddenly, on the third day, the doctors realised something was seriously wrong with Courtney.

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THE STORY OF BABY COURTNEY: SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUNGEST CRIME VICTIM

Two years ago, Courtney Ellerbeck was shot by a hijacker while still in her mother's womb. In Chapter 1 we told how her mother was rushed to hospital where she had a Caesarean delivery, and how initial tests showed that Courtney appeared to have flesh wounds only. In part 2 we pick up the story three days later ...

BY GILL GIFFORD

"In a country where violent crime dominates the headlines, many inspiring stories of hope become lost in time and statistics. But one case I have covered as *The Star*'s chief crime reporter has touched me deeply – I will never forget the story of baby Courtney. This is why."

GREG REYNOLDS

A bundle of tubes ... and beauty

Sleeping beauty ... Lesley spends a tender moment with 3-week-old Courtney. There were no signs yet that she was unable to move her legs.

PROLOGUE

The young mother stands at the kitchen sink washing dishes on a Wednesday morning. Her five-month-old baby girl dangles in her walking ring nearby, chewing on her breakfast of toast and Marmite. As Lesley Ellerbeck chats away to little Courtney, the child suddenly utters not "Mommy". Not sure that she heard correctly, Lesley turns around and asks: "Whatchild you say?". And Courtney repeats her first word, "Mommy". As Lesley shrieks with joy at this momentous occasion, the tiny tot smiles shyly, blushes and buries her head in sudden embarrassment.

Nine months before, this happy family moment didn't seem possible ...

CHAPTER 2

It was the most intriguing case Dr Ritchie Verbaeder* was working on. His most famous patient, baby Courtney Ellerbeck, lay guarded day and night by police. Even the doctor's mother in the neo-natal ICU of Arroyo clinic in Kempton Park.

Any premature baby would have been there. But she also had a bullet wound to contend with. The bullet fired by a hijacker had passed just beneath her left buttock, narrowly missed her spine and exited again through her back.

Early tests had revealed no serious damage, but the grey-haired doctor was concerned.

Was he seeing signs of normal discomfort and pain, or was this something else? And the tiny baby seemed restless. If only the little scrap of humanity could tell him what she felt.

Dr Verbaeder called in a surgeon. They monitored the baby and later that morning decided that they would have to operate to find out what was going on.

The baby was wheeled into theatre where her tummy was cut open.

The surgeon discovered that the earlier tests had been wrong. The bullet had cut through mummy's bowel, and this had caused feces to poison her abdomen – causing the swelling. The damaged parts of colon were cut away, and she was closed up.

All the while, her mother Lesley was in the same clinic recovering from her own injuries.

Soon had been the Caesarean delivery, the removal of most of her spleen, and more surgery to her colon, damaged by the same bullet that had injured Courtney.

Lesley was just down the corridor – but she might have been on the other side of the planet.

Both mother and daughter were too ill to move. And so Lesley had not yet held, or even seen, her baby.

The sixth day came, and Lesley was finally helped into a wheelchair and taken down the passage to see Courtney.

The frail baby was crowded with a frightening array of tubes, lines, drains and monitors.

Because doctors were afraid she had jaundice, she had been placed under yellow lights with protective glasses covering her eyes.

The tiny bundle was gently passed to Lesley and there, in her mother's arms, Courtney opened her eyes for the first time.

She stared up with an expression of pain which Lesley read as a silent call: "Help me, mommy. Please help me!"

Terrified by the tubes and monitors, and frustrated by her inability to make things better, Lesley broke down and handed the baby back to nurses. She had held her for exactly two minutes.

Lesley begged to be wheeled back to her own ward, feeling unable to cope.

But she quickly grew stronger. Battling with her own recovery, she would spend every possible minute at her little one's side. Holding Courtney's hand, stroking her gently and talking to her.

She stood by as Courtney underwent physiotherapy to wean her off the oxygen machines which were doing her lungs.

Feeling stronger and mindful of the mounting medical bills, Lesley moved to Glen Courtney home.

But both doctors warned that she would have to wait several weeks as the baby couldn't be discharged before she reached a good weight of 1kg.

And then mom and baby received another blow. When Courtney was three weeks old, her father came to visit her in hospital – as he had been doing regularly, pounding media interviews and pledging his support.

But that day he changed his mind and informed Lesley that he was leaving and did not intend returning. It was the last time Lesley and Courtney heard from him.

By 1st July, the baby's weight picked up as she recovered. It seemed that it would not be long before Courtney could go home to start life as an ordinary baby.

But the worst was still to come. Doctors and nurses started noticing that her left leg hung limply. Lesley also started to move more normally, her legs appeared very stiff.

Investigation revealed yet more damage nobody had known about: there were problems with her sciatic and pelvic muscle joints, and her ilium – the bone structure in the spine situated very close to the bullet entry site – had been damaged.

It meant the child was paralysed, and would probably never walk.

But Lesley would not give up hope. She continued massaging her baby to stimulate her legs and continued with physiotherapy.

Finally, at the age of one month and two days – still almost a month before she should have been born – Courtney was finally allowed to go home. Weighing just 2kg, she was discharged from hospital and finally joined her mother at the Birch Acres family home belonging to her grandparents George and Mary Ellerbeck.

The Sun-Ds, who had been seemingly anticipating the new arrival, had rearranged the house. George and Mary had moved into Lesley's old room, allowing the new mom to use their bigger en-suite bedroom for her and Courtney.

At the baby continued growing, she would now visit Dr Verbaeder at his rooms. There, away from the sterile hospital, on limp images of babies and toddlers bright as buttons stuck out from the walls of the waiting room walls.

Courtney's photograph soon became one of the many that are viewed by concerned parents browsing with their sick children.

The kindly doctor virtually became part of the Ellerbeck family. On most premature babies, Courtney was prone to infection.

There were many emergency admissions to hospital in the middle of the night – pneumonia or bronchitis. Dr Verbaeder was always there.

But the biggest problem faced by the little girl was that of her paralysis, which became more apparent as she grew.

Other children of the same age started sitting and standing, while Courtney struggled. She learned to sit by holding onto her mother, but would often topple over backwards when she released her grip to play or reach out.

Seeing Courtney alongside other two-year-old children of the same age was trying for Lesley.

Many times she cried out, bitterness as she watched Courtney falling behind in her development.

As other children crawled, so Courtney would drag her little body along on her stomach by pulling herself with her hands.

When other toddlers took their first steps, so Courtney learnt to bounce along on her bottom, using her hands to pull her legs in line and push herself along.

"Look mom, I walking," was her proud exclamation when she managed to scoot herself along from one place to another.

Although Dr Verbaeder and his colleagues said it was unlikely she would ever walk, Lesley and the family refused to give up hope. After all, Courtney would sometimes complain when she had nappy rash – an indicator she had some feeling.

Grimly determined to do everything in their power to help their little blonde poppet walk, they turned to orthotics professionals, physiotherapy and alternative therapy.

They took her for hyperbaric treatment, a type of oxygen therapy in which she breathes concentrated oxygen under pressure in a special tank. The sessions – many of which were paid for by a donor – were expected to speed up her healing process.

And so life settled into its new pattern.

When Courtney was 18 months old, Lesley decided to find a nursery school for her. She had begun working as a receptionist at a motor dealer, and felt her little girl needed friends, and would benefit from the stimulation.

After an initial battle to find a pre-school prepared to take Courtney with her special needs, Lesley found Stitch-In, a friendly, welcoming place. It was just what she was looking for.

But Lesley's child started well. Initially, Courtney was put in the "baby class", given her small size and inability to walk. She loved it, crying every day and clinging to her mom.

Then she was moved into the older "potty training class" with others of her own age, and everything changed. The little girl quickly settled in and began to make friends.

It's been a year at Stitch-In, and Courtney loves her school. On weekends, she talks constantly about her teacher Mickey and looks forward to the start of each new week.

As her lifestyle plan on the swings and jungle gyms, Courtney seem to join in. Teachers help her up, and the other toddlers, instinctively stretch out their hands to her, help her and hold her gently in their grip.

Courtney has become a lively, pretty child who should rightly be a toddler.

She is a paraplegic, but at two years old she is not yet able to understand that she is different to other children.

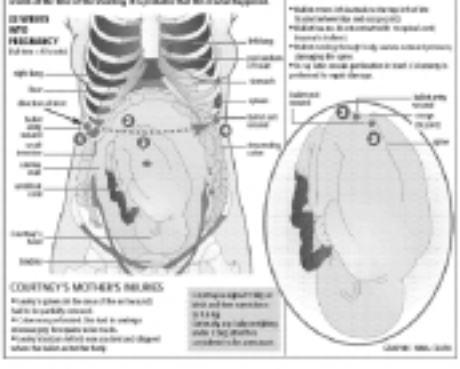
** Name changed for professional reasons.*

CHAPTER 3

The extraordinary family, and the love, that are helping to rebuild Courtney

▶ NEXT PAGE

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN LESLEY WAS SHOT



Cheerful chemin ... Courtney, not yet a year old, poses for a studio portrait soon after learning to sit on her own.

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THE STORY OF BABY COURTNEY: SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUNGEST CRIME VICTIM

Two years ago Courtney Ellerbeck was shot by a hijacker while still in her mother's womb. Chapters 1 and 2 of our story told of the attack; how Lesley Ellerbeck gave birth two months prematurely; and how hope that the baby had been spared serious injury faded when doctors found she was a paraplegic. Courtney has a long way to go, but today we end this part of her story of SA's youngest crime victim.

BY GILL GIFFORD

"As *The Star*'s chief crime reporter I regularly see the anger, bitterness, desperation and helplessness of victims. What I will always remember about Courtney is the strength, courage, hope and – above all – love displayed by her mother and the rest of her family as they triumphed over disaster."

A cry…a smile…a kiss

MARCH 2000 JULY 2002

From this to this … and against all the odds, Courtney's mother hopes her baby will walk again

STEVE LAWRENCE

Beaming brightly ... Courtney has grown into a happy, loveable child who truly enjoys the treats that life has to offer her.

PROLOGUE

The young mother and her parents are shown into a doctor's room where she hands her baby over to the paediatric orthopaedic surgeon. She has waited anxiously for this moment – she has been told the doctor is the best and could provide all her baby's future child will eventually walk.

The doctor gently examines Courtney while Lesley Ellerbeck once again explains how her child had been shot before she was born. Then baby Courtney suddenly took the floor. She began to pee all over the doctor and her examination table. Baby may now also have to control her bladder.

Then the doctor tells the anxious mother that Courtney has compromised hip abduction and needs an operation to extend her flattened hip bones well. As a result he made no bold for her straight future – surgery which would be further planned, painful, expensive and have added risks. But then, in what Lesley has come to remember as the worst moment of her life, the doctor calmly tells Lesley that, with or without the operation, her child will never walk...

CHAPTER 2

The little blonde girl hurries slowly across the brightly decorated pre-school classroom floor, pushing her legs in front of her as she rotates forward on her bottom. She wants excitedly as she sees her mother approaching, reaching up towards what she can be picked up.

Both laugh and cuddle each other as mother lifts daughter and they celebrate their regular end-of-day reunion, joyfully hugging each other tightly.

This cuddly embrace is the typical ending of a school day for Courtney, who is now learning to live with her physical disability.

It is also the start of the round-the-routine for the Ellerbeck family who never home to a busy programme of learning and feeding the baby before settling her down for the night, preparing supper, and doing the washing and all the other normal chores that are part of life in a busy household.

The family sometimes have all to endure their lives around Courtney, yet each has been affected differently.

George Ellerbeck, a friendly blonde-man, heads the household and is devoted to his wife, children and grandchildren. He works in the e-business development field and, at 56, has now finally together an idea – a project his family views with much amusement.

Courtney calls him Dad-dad, and adores him. George struggles to deal with the fact that she often gets sick and vomits to his bemusement, often requiring a drop with that she was breathless.

George has consciously kept much of all the medical bills in a huffy brown envelope, mentioning contact with doctors and laboratories, amassing all that they will be paid.

Medical costs for Lesley and Courtney's hospital stations and surgery after the shooting amounted to just over R60 000, which George, Mary and Lesley have been paying off monthly. "They are now clearing the last laboratory account for R1000, meaning that the end of the first load of expenses is finally in sight. But as the child is still growing, costing for the rest of Courtney's life.

The Courtney Ellerbeck Trust Fund was established at the time of the shooting, but did not attract the type of large corporate donors. Instead, those who gave were people who had been touched by Courtney's plight.

An oblique letter took a collection, and together money used to give birth to a stunted child went for a song. Altogether an amount of R8 701 was deposited in the fund account, and has long since been spent on Courtney's medical bills.

The mother of the house is 48-year-old Mary Ellerbeck, George's wife. She sees the doctor regularly as a challenge, looking forward to the day she can hold her head high in the knowledge that every account has been paid.

Where George does struggles with the injustice of fate, Mary patiently accepts Courtney's condition and calmly deals with "each day as it comes because there's no use worrying about tomorrow".

Sometimes, on the family picnic up route home in the evenings, Lesley and Courtney enter the Arroyo time to call Mary to some home. But the hospital holds hidden memories for the child.

When she glimpses someone in their theatre gear, Courtney shrieks in fear: "Granny quick, let's go."

In a proud gesture with kind, spunky eyes and no-open, gap-toothed smile, Mary is the heart of the home who ensures that everyone runs regular needs and that the daily seconds of washing get done.

She manages to make time for anyone in need, and she bubbles over when asked how her grandaughter is progressing. Her proudly relates new anecdotes about Courtney, but now focuses on with a look of restrained sigh they pass every day or her illness with Courtney the diseases.

The two sons of the house are Robert, who is 25, and 23-year-old Malcolm. Robert, who works for a computer company, has recently moved out of the house. Malcolm is mentally retarded and has sheltered employment at a protected workshop.

Courtney, unable to pronounce Malcolm's name, calls him Ya-Ya. She adores her young uncle and has learned that the gentle soul will do anything for her. When her favourite tune stops she only has to call out "Ya-ya" and point at the stereo, for him to quickly turn her favourite tape over and play the other side. An excited "Wellies, Ya-Ya" when she hears it entering outside, gets him to take her for a walk in the garden.

The brothers are protective of their only sister Lesley, who is now 39 and employed as a receptionist at an East Rand motor dealership.

The single guarded that too through Lesley's abdomen and ripped through infants Courtney caused massive damage. While her womb has been repaired and she'll most likely be able to bear more children, Lesley's spleen was badly damaged. Although doctors initially contemplated removing the spleen completely they managed to save a quarter of this organ which is responsible for fighting off infections.

Lesley underwent micro-surgery in her calves, which was replaced by the bullet. Early fears were that infection could set in, but she was fortunately spared from this happening.

The damage to her body handed Lesley many life to cells. By and other common infections. She also suffers considerable digestive problems and pain.

According to Superintendent Andy Pinke, police spokesperson for the East Rand, the docket has been closed on the instruction of senior officers who decided that a breathing rough was unlikely. It will only be re-opened until investigation if new information comes to light.

Today Courtney is happy and well adjusted. Her latest nursery school report shows that she is three tall, weighs 18kg and wears a size four shoe – the average size worn by one year-olds.

Lesley is intent on placing Courtney in a mainstream pre-school, but has found the exercise not without complications.

Of the almost 400 schools she phoned, only ten schools are prepared to take in Courtney – the others claiming they are not wheelchair friendly and rejecting her because of her "special needs".

The young mother was devastated when many of the schools referred her to the special schools with which she was familiar because her retarded brother had attended them. Proudly believing that Courtney's disability is purely physical, she is determined that her child will have a normal schooling.

The little girl still moves around by frequent crawling or scooting along the floor on her bottom that soon she'll need to have a wheelchair – yet another expense and something she feels she will need to have specially made for her.

Despite everything, the Ellerbecks continue to hold on to the hope that Courtney will one day walk – even if only with callipers. They are looking at hyperbaric oxygen therapy and other unusual treatments in the hope that their little puppet can do so.

It is still not known whether Courtney has any feeling in her lower body – although she sometimes complains when she has nappy rash, at other times she appears anesthetised. The concern at this stage is whether she can be potty trained or whether she will be permanently incontinent.

Lesley feels the deep pain of mixed emotions whenever she looks at her daughter.

"She's taught me patience, and she's made me cry – sometimes out of frustration and anger at what has happened to her, and other times it's just out of pure heartache, because she's so beautiful and clever and cute," Lesley says.

But what stands out most is the deep love the Ellerbecks have for each other and fierce protectiveness and devotion they have for Courtney.

"They haven't just hope, and they're not bitter. They draw their positive outlook, comes from Courtney herself, and desperation or any other negativity is banned outright because that would impact on their precious angel.

As a sign of their optimism, they have recently bought the little girl a tricycle, which she loves and has named her "Fast one".

As Courtney is pushed along, she sings the lord, cheerfully in her and bursting loudly. This image is symbolic of her life: a cheerful little girl making her way forward against all odds with the love and support of her family.

EPILOGUE

■ Courtney's fight is far from over. The family still will have to pay huge amounts for her treatment and her life if you would like to help you can send your donation to:

The Courtney Hope Ellerbeck Trust Fund
account: xxxxxxxxxx
XXXXXX Branch number (XXX)

Happy family ... Courtney, Lesley, grandfather George, grandmother Mary and uncle Quinton in the lounge of their Boksburg home.

Case Study 3: The Hefer Show

Now for three very different pages, all from the Hefer Commission of Inquiry into whether Bulelani Ngcuka, head of the National Prosecuting Authority, was an apartheid spy and whether, as a result of this, he abused his powers.

Hefer, of course, was a serious affair, and we sent two of our most senior writers and a photographer to Bloemfontein. But there was another side to Hefer: it was also showbiz. Almost all the characters involved were flamboyant, sometimes arrogant, often grandstanding and aware they were on TV in a mini-OJ Simpson show. Our pages sought to capture both the substance and the circus.

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Page 1: 15 October 2003

The first day of the hearings set the tone for our coverage. We spoke to Mac Maharaj outside the building. He was belligerent and tore into Ngcuka and compared him to FBI chief Edgar J Hoover who 'had held nine American presidents to ransom'.

We were hurtling towards our 11am deadline.

First the headline: Avoid the trite, the obvious and the hackneyed. It would have been easy to resort to: Maharaj slams/lashes/attacks Ngcuka, but the way I work is to take myself out of the story itself and write a headline that captures the essence of the story.

In this case the picture wrote the headline. There was Mac, impeccably dressed, jaunty, a half-smile, almost a sneer, of confidence on his face… and a cigarette dangling out of his mouth. Immediately I thought of the song and so MAC THE KNIFE became the headline, integrated into the picture.

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The Star
WITH BUSINESSREPORT

The Star & Checkers
COMPETITION
WIN GROCERIES
WORTH R20 000 ▸P9

THE HEFER SPY PROBE: DAY 1

MAC THE KNIFE

Fired-up Maharaj slashes Ngcuka before probe is postponed again

Much huff, no puff

ANC urged to help in Ngcuka probe

Lover jailed for deadly deceit

LATEST
Bomb hits US convoy in Gaza

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cut OUT the middleman.
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WHO'S GOING TO BE LEFT AT THE END?
AIDS IS WIPING US OUT, SAY VILLAGERS
▸ Page 17

INDICATORS

Page 2: 23 November 2003

Maharaj's day in front of the lights came a month later. His evidence-in-chief was a damning indictment of Ngcuka, but under cross-examination his accusations were whittled away and when he was finally excused, he had damned himself. The challenge: How to create a page that would sing the next day?

Television carried pictures of Maharaj and the substance of his evidence. How would we write a story that would be powerful and fresh? How would we illustrate it? And how would we headline it? What was the essence of the story? Simply, he had destroyed himself… he was no longer MAC THE KNIFE, but MAC THE KNIFED.

The visual? No photograph could capture this approach, so I turned to *Star* cartoonist Dov Fedler and he came up with a brilliantly simple caricature of Maharaj stabbing himself in the back.

Writer Jeremy Gordin loved this approach and wrote a comment/analysis tailor-made for the cartoon. It was a gem and a great example of how a story should be designed. Every day on every newspaper you hear the emphasis on intros, intros, intros. Seldom does an editor say: 'That was a great punchline.' The ending of a truly memorable piece of writing has both.

Gordin started his story this way: 'For more than five months, Mac Maharaj has been stropping the knife of his anger against a whetstone of humiliation and indignation, and he came to the Hefer Commission on Monday ready to plunge the blade into Bulelani Ngcuka.'

And this was his ending: 'Maharaj came to the commission carrying a questionable document, with a skeleton or two rattling in his cupboard, and he has tended to treat the witness stand as a soapbox. This has deflected his knife from its original target and into himself.'

This page, because of its originality and content, became one of the most striking to come out of the Hefer Commission.

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LOTTO
LAST NIGHT'S DRAW
20 23 24 27 30 46 + 1
▶ ALL THE PAYOUTS ... PAGE 2

The Star
with BUSINESSREPORT

TRANSNET EXPECTS R2,3BN FOREX LOSS
FULL STORY IN BUSINESSREPORT

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MAC THE KNIFED

Slowly his Ngcuka dossier fell apart and Maharaj's attacks were deflected back at himself

For more than five months, Mac Maharaj has been dropping the kinds of hints major spymasters who control the levers of State Security usually only dream about.

But after three days in front of the commission, it looks as though the former strongest minister and liberation stalwart might have made his knife cut himself.

Seeking a motive for the apparently inexplicable malignity and disrespect displayed repeatedly by the assistant director of public prosecutions, Maharaj chose to raise against Ngcuka a report written in 1997/98 by ANC intelligence unit, MUK, run by Maharaj's comrade, Ido Shaik, in KwaZulu-Natal.

...and today Maharaj is unlikely to get any help from Shaik, who will now go before the commission to prove that Ngcuka was an apartheid spy. This was said by his brother and legal adviser Yunis Shaik yesterday.

"Mac Shaik said the public should not expect themselves from Shaik's evidence." He will tell the commission what information he gathered in 1989 and if the commission deems it necessary to do it."

According to this report, "investigations" by Shaik in 1998, Ngcuka was a spy for the apartheid regime, operating "within ANC structures". But, the Weekly Mail reported, Maharaj was forced to concede that the report contained a number of flaws.

Parts number 29 of the report concerned "further confirmation of MPs (Dullah) Ngcuka's role in the NIS (National Intelligence Service), the apartheid government's security service and was created as a result of a telephonic conversation with Mac Maharaj on 1 July 1997." It went on to say that Ngcuka many weeks that trip and Maharaj's evidence on this matter.

Similarly, point 102 of the report reads that "the source is from the legal community who was involved with Nadel (National Association of Democratic Lawyers) and who has attended (a) particular meeting of Nadel."

Sibusiso Sikamana, who appeared for Ngcuka, said Maharaj's list of a second "who's who" of African post-legal fraternity – speculating each other every and constantly as though he were knocking each one in the eye into a coffin.

Both of them had insisted that meeting in 1988, and Sikamana asked Maharaj: "Is it correct that Ngcuka before those people if they ask, as they would, that Maharaj told you that [former Maharaj replied: "I don't have any information to allege otherwise."

"There are some things I do not agree with [other] report," Maharaj said. "I believe [the] information that Ngcuka was [that] effect to co-operate in the Nkomati [non-]aggression [pact]. I do not agree with [that] about Nadel."

In the end, following a long exchange with Sikamana during which Sikamana implored Maharaj "simply to say I do not know whether or not Ngcuka was a spy", Maharaj conceded: "I do not know that Ngcuka was a spy."

Sikamana replied: "Now the whole of South Africa knows that Mac Maharaj does not know whether Ngcuka was a spy or not."

But the worst was not over for Maharaj. Ngcuka's legal team had made it clear that it has been "gaslighted before" in the commission. And, immediately after having pushed Maharaj to concede on the Shaik report, Sikamana introduced the session that had taken place in Pieter Mark Fischer's chambers.

Following a raid at the Johannesburg offices of Mbeki bodyguard Selebi-Phiri (accused in Selebi-Shaik), Maharaj was, first, accused of "corruption" and then, when that was quashed during his torture on computer account, questions were asked about money paid by Shaiks to Maharaj's wife, Zarina, and about a trip Maharaj and Nelson Mandela took to Mount Meru.

This prompted an investigation by Pieter Mark, whom Maharaj was a director, an investigation apparently requested by Maharaj himself. The final report of the "internal" investigation was never released.

What happened was that the bank and Maharaj released a joint statement stating that Maharaj had been cleared other than over the matter of the trip to Mt Meru. World, it also said Maharaj had no short-term mortgage because he balanced the questions raised about him made his position untenable in the banking sector.

Maharaj's attack is done yesterday that the Scorpions had presented the limited investigation report, his repeatedly asked Maharaj, in Maharaj's obvious anguish and rather incoherent, why that the report raised the question of whether Maharaj was "able and proper person" to remain on the board of a banking group.

On Tuesday there was a prolonged exchange between Maharaj and senior counsel Norman Arendse, appearing for Jacinta Eleanor Powell Hoskins, in which Arendse investigated why Maharaj had not raised the spying allegations to cabinet when Ngcuka was chosen to be appointed to the Scorpions position.

Maharaj said he had not remembered the 1997 report about Ngcuka. But at the same time he said he was focused on "national reconciliation" and Ngcuka was doing his job well, so why should he object?

Arendse argued that this explanation represented a glaring contradiction. He said that, rather, the issue of Ngcuka had remained a real thing in Maharaj's mind. Maharaj would not have had to mention the issue in terms of national reconciliation. Maharaj would not have thought of Ngcuka as someone with whom the country needed to be "reconciled".

Maharaj continued to insist that in the mid-'90s he simply did not remember that Ngcuka had been flagged as a spy in 1989.

In general all the commissioners members treated Maharaj with respect and humour. When evidence leader Advocate Nicolas Ilic asked Maharaj whether he could let go Maharaj to take his verbiage, the judge replied: "Mac is my cousin, too."

Maharaj's insistence perhaps once admitted Maharaj for his forgetfulness and to the forgiveness.

But Maharaj's body-word his patience of concerns with his colleagues and apparent inability to apply "yes" or "no" to questions.

Maharaj claims in this submission currently a questionable document, with a dubious relationship to his cupboard, and the inconsistencies mean the witness must not be taken at face value, the commissioners implied.

Mo oh so wants to be wrong about Ngcuka

By Estelle Ellis and Susan Comrie

He was would be happy to concede that he was wrong about Saxonwold if shown to be so.

As said Mr Shaik, the former ANC intelligence operative, during his cross-examination today Shaik's authored the report which said that Ngcuka, the National Director of Public Prosecutions, was investigated for being an apartheid spy. The Shaik report was published and led to the establishment of the Commission, chaired by Mac Maharaj, which is currently under cross-examination for did not know whether Ngcuka was a spy.

In his testimony today Shaik admitted contradictions in head of ANC intelligence at the time, had attempted to interfere with Ngcuka's investigation into identity number the Ngcuka.

■ Why security police caused them [illegible] to meet Ngcuka to cross a passport for Ngcuka to travel to Switzerland. This was at the time when he was linked to the High Treason trial in Pietermaritzburg.

■ How Ngcuka, in conversations with other ANC members, referred to an apartheid agent named Edward Cousens, using his code name "Jeeves". "How did Ngcuka know Jeeves? Why did he ask about him?", asked Shaik.

Shaik, who finally took the stand after several days of delays, also spoke for the first time about the "Browse" report, which he said was compiled by Ngcuka's former colleagues in the National Intelligence Service (NIS) and handed to Ngcuka in 1997.

Shaik said the report was "a collection of rumours" about Ngcuka and Mbeki, and was compiled by NIS officials who were "disgruntled" with Ngcuka.

Shaik also described how Durban lawyer Geoffrey Mvange had approached him in 1997 and claimed that Ngcuka did not share the strong values of the ANC. Mvange was murdered in the 1990s by the security police.

All the twists and turns ▶ PAGE 4

Jacko faces arrest on molestation charges

Los Angeles: An arrest warrant has been issued for Michael Jackson on charges that he committed multiple acts of child molestation.

A spokesperson for the singer said he would return from Las Vegas, where he is promoting his new album, to Santa Barbara "immediately" to turn himself in. In a statement, the star denied any wrongdoing and called the charges malicious and unfounded.

The warrant, issued yesterday, comes a day after authorities spent 14 hours searching for evidence at his 1 100sq Neverland Ranch in Santa Barbara County. The 300m-plus property includes exotic animals and amusements such as a private roller rink, and is where Jackson first cohabited sleeping with children in his bed.

Sheik Hichem Hamdi, Assistant Thomas Sneddon said the case involved actions of alleged victim under the age of 14 who was prepared to testify against Jackson.

Sneddon wouldn't detail the alleged molestations, but he said Jackson would be charged with multiple counts of lewd and lascivious conduct with a child.

If convicted, Jackson (46) could face a maximum sentence of eight years in prison on each count.

Jackson has been dogged over the past decade by allegations of sexual liaisons with children.

Talented man ... Michael Jackson is by turn himself a...

JONAH'S GIANT BATTLE

BEHIND THE SMILE ... the agony

A touching 2-page story of one of rugby's greatest players, and his triumphs and tragedies

IN THE STAR TOMORROW

Put your foot down and blow your mind ...

By Rob Shaffer

Cape Town was chosen as the venue for the world launch of the McLaren Mercedes-Benz SLR, a flashy car with futuristic styling and supercar-racing performance.

Chief Executive Ron Dennis, a member of international motoring journalists are expected to arrive next week for the launch, which has attracted an "unprecedented" level of interest.

After a briefing at which winners of technical details were released, motoring journalists and photographers joined curious passers-by in scrutinising seven parked SLRs valued at about R3-million each.

Motoring enthusiast Bernard Roberts was impressed with the high standard of workmanship on the vehicle.

"This piece of machine looks very intimidating, but if I had the money I would buy one straight away," he said.

Joseph Logan, Mercedes-Benz Service Manager, said: "I would love to own one of these cars – it's a beautiful machine. It is difficult to accept that this dream of ours has been created by human beings."

Australia Car Group head of global communications Johannes Bollenrath said if the manufacturers brought in his "this would be total driver enjoyment, north of Joburg."

FULL STORY IN motoring

INDICATORS

Let your ideas flow

NOKIA
DIGITAL PEN

NOKIA
Connecting People

Page 3: 28 November 2003

Pieter-Dirk Uys often thanked the Nat politicians, whose words and deeds, he said, wrote his scripts. For the last of the three Hefer pages we must thank Vusi Mona, then editor of *City Press*, the paper that broke the story alleging Ngcuka was probably an apartheid spy.

Jeremy Gordin was in Johannesburg when Mona gave evidence and we watched his performance on TV. He was engaging, self-effacing and he smiled, smiled, smiled.

I said to Gordin: 'Hell, his name should be Mona Lisa.'

On the last day of his evidence, we again sat watching Mona, this time not his smiles, but his grimaces, dismay and destruction as he crumbled under relentless cross-examination.

The name, and the smiles and the frown, became the inspiration. Gordin leapt at my suggestion that we do a 'How Mona Lisa Lost His Smile' front page and illustrate it with two pictures of Vusi, one smiling, the other grim, superimposed over Da Vinci's portrait.

Again Gordin wrote a superb piece and again we had a front page that stood out from the rest. The only change from the original idea was Gordin's suggestion that we change 'Lisa' to 'Loser' in the headline.

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HOTTEST CHRISTMAS TOYS
Page 13

The Star
WITH BUSINESS REPORT

OSCARS OF SA COUTURE
Verve, Page 20

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 28 2003 Established October 11 1887 R3 (Inc VAT) (R4 outside Gauteng) Annual subscribers: R2.50 www.star.co.za

NGCUKA ACCUSER TORN TO SHREDS

How Mona Loser lost his smile

NEW ANALYSIS / COMMENT

Changing face ... the smile on the face of Vusi Mona walked under cross-examination and by the end of the day he had become the image of unwanted, evasive witness. ► See Page 7

Outraged ... Kazuki Nishi today

Maduna's son arrested for reckless driving

YOUR STAR TODAY

Today's newspaper comes in three sections:

1 News: Pages 1-16
2 News, Letters, Opinion, Inside: Pages 17-22 Sport: 23-32
3 Verve: Pages 20-34 Classifieds: 39-44

Classifieds continue in a section, separate section

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BUSINESS REPORT

Private sector targeted in anti-graft laws

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Case Study 4: A fall of sparrows

This challenge was probably the greatest – and it sums up the extraordinary road a designer must be prepared to travel in a quest for excellence.

It started as a simple idea. Reporter Nalisha Kalideen and chief photographer Debbie Yazbek came to news editor Cecilia Russell and me one day in June 2003 and said they wanted to do a major story on a mother who was HIV-positive and how it affected minor children.

They had met a remarkable animal welfare worker in a township west of Johannesburg. She told them she was spending more and more of her time helping people. They told her of their idea and she said she would find them a woman – with the injunction: Remember, she said, they are people, not just statistics of a national tragedy.

The story seemed pretty simple. It wasn't. Six months later we went to press, wrung out, enmeshed emotionally in the story, traumatised – and with a three-part 10 000-word saga.

The idea changed dramatically after Nalisha and Debbie met two very different mothers, one gentle, the other tough. Both were ravaged by AIDS. We decided we would tell the story of both their lives… and follow them until they died.

It became a story of two unforgettable women, Julia and Peggy, the one 40, the other 31, whose lives had been hard; a story of poverty and hunger and cold, and rape and anger and despair, and love found and vanished, and hope kindled and dashed.

And a story of courage – for neither had lost her spirit. Sick as they were, there were still flashes of fire and humour, and enduring love and caring for their children – and the worry of what would happen to them when they were gone.

Nalisha and Debbie met Julia and Peggy about 30 times and got to know them and their families, both in their shacks and at the AIDS hospice where they died. Every time Nalisha saw them she would write up the experience and Debbie would show me that day's pictures. We would meet daily to discuss the latest reports and pictures, pick out the holes, debate what was still needed… and back they would go. After five months, Cecilia and I must have read about 40 000 words and seen hundreds of pictures.

After they moved into the hospice, Nalisha began writing. We spent many hours arguing over the writing and there were moments of frustration and even anger as Nalisha wrote and rewrote the entire story several times.

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After Julia died I began the final stage – the layout.

Choosing the projection, the feel, the headline and pictures: inspiration for the title came from a gripping Yazbek picture and the name of the hospice – Sparrows. The picture showed Julia's hands fluttering like a bird's wings and symbolised the two women's lives – a nonstop battle against the wind. And I remembered the words from the Bible, words we found out later had inspired the hospice's name:

For only a penny you can buy two sparrows,
Yet not one sparrow falls to the ground
without your Father's consent…

And so the title: A fall of sparrows.

Unlike 'A bullet for an unborn baby', which was relieved by joy and hope, the story of Julia and Peggy was unmitigated tragedy. The layout reflected this. All the pictures were black and white; we used a heavy, sombre sans font, the pages were stark, and the words and pictures were completely separated so they did not impinge on each other.

With Peggy's death we went to print.

Six months later our faith was rewarded when 'A fall of sparrows' won both the feature and the story of the year prizes at the Mondi Awards. Debbie Yazbek was a finalist in the photographic section and later became Photographer of the Year in the Vodacom Awards.

I hope this has given you insight into the concept of designing stories, how it is there to honour the journey of the writers and photographers as they put their dreams in our hands. And how designing this way is far more rewarding for your newspaper, the writers and photographers – and for you.

Becoming a designer means a lot of running on the road as you share these dreams from the start. You won't dance under the lights every day, or even every week. But remember for all his years of roadwork Muhammad Ali danced under the lights for less than 48 hours in his 55 fights.

Becoming a designer means a lot of running on the road as you share these dreams from the start. You won't dance under the lights every day, or even every week.

And he was, and still is The Greatest.

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A fall of

The roller-coaster lives of Julia and Peggy, and the final journey that

For only a penny you can buy two sparrows,
Yet not one sparrow falls to the ground
Without your Father's consent

Matthew 10 verse 29:

JULIA'S STORY

The years of pride and a job and love and hope and health

sparrows

has taken them to the place where they face their moment of truth

PHOTOGRAPHS: DEBBIE YAZBEK

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PEGGY'S STORY

Once upon a time there was a beauty in a red dress…

"We are a. The baby who was a," Elizabeth Loupis. "There was an other Ewe."

Her short-length vision is clear. She don't know, but she do now, perhaps better as the darkest of a time of troughout hopelessness when she realise of learned his name.

Sharpe and when Ewe as three years ones. Julia and she children with took to bedroom as a new when, in their memory, were the bed about overjoyed.

But she's were has so like Ewe with the mornings the same ...

Peggy doesn't remember exactly when she reached Johannesburg. She was a little between working as a maid-maker across the road from the in.

She fell in love, and she fell pregnant. The new married and when Peggy knew from Sebenza's brother that he had run away back to KwaZulu-Natal she was on her.

But by the time Dumisani was born, in May 1988, Peggy was no longer working and she feared for her baby's future.

She tried to get Sebenza to support them but he gave her money only occasionally as she remembered as any which her mother and sisters, who helped her and the child.

Though Sebenza's mother, or grandma's, support Dumisani it didn't change he had no interest in his son. Peggy remembers how evening to take Dumisani back to his father's household with him.

"I said: 'No, you didn't any kiddie, and child's play woman, for birth clothes. Now you were Dumisani!' I say to."

"When Dumisani's Happy' is couple," Peggy said now.

Though her relationship with Sebenza didn't benefit, Peggy was young and still a mother.

At 21, still living in Diepkloof, she met "Bodani. They were sociated lovers, but he eventually left her for another woman.

He also left her pregnant and she had a baby girl, Tshepo, in August 1991.

"Bodani didn't show since he knew and Peggy never told him... not since after Tshepo died from pneumonia when she was 4 months old.

"Was also this hard, was so big," Peggy says firmly.

She worked as a salesman in Bezuidenhout Valley before she gave birth and she found work as a cleaner in Yeoville's pensionata.

"I was working until I was nine months pregnant. I would work the things I did like the floor. When I could see from the children were in it in the fridge for milk," I.

"When she baby died, I was down and said: 'My baby's dead and it's because of you'.

"I said and she for a long time after that," Peggy remembers.

It was four years later, and after she had moved to Lesotho she met her boyfriend, Vincent.

They first suspect for six years in the single room she and her sister Nandi's house. Peggy was still unemployed, and when she fell pregnant because Vincent had never in her life and out of contraception.

"We didn't use a condom. We only would like for when I asked him to use a condom. He don't want to use. Still ask why must he use a condom?" I would say I was from another man. (Pause)," Peggy says.

By then her close Catholicism, with whom she had grown up in Mofolang, had died. And her sister's husband daughter Lesang was also pregnant.

"I was pregnant but we didn't have Lesang's pregnancy. Her mother in Commercial Hospital and when we said, he's in the Only she was six months pregnant.

"The baby came in seven months. I took the appointment all the doctors had given me but as Lesang because she had no clothes, nothing for the baby," Peggy remembers.

Just once though she wasn't working, and was pregnant, her sister Peggy came to Lesang and her partners out. Tony.

Just when Peggy fell in second son, Vere, who was born in 1993.

She applied for a child grant and spoke the money on her new family, paying for Lesang's school fees, buying clothes and, most importantly, food for their children.

She must have been down, but Lesang recalls: "She was nice all the time she was laughing and had music. Always."

And Peggy joined Vere. "She don't let him out on sick. She don't want to baby to be baby."

"When she went to sleep she would take the baby with her. She'll tell Dumisani, 'She's to me my baby anymore, you're not daughter. But he liked the baby too," Lesang says.

She is now Lesang's permanent baby, Tony, and now Peggy's holding for Vere who are school. You need to discuss of every time.

The door is shoddy, because Peggy don't remember a carefree to us much sacrifices she has never declared Vere dead.

She is also after blankets she has sent us a few years in her life.

For both Peggy and Julia, the good stories seem over.

TOMORROW: The time of the curse and the people of the night

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A fall of sparrows:

Part 2: The good times are over for Julia and Peggy. This is

REPORT
NALEDA KALDIGH

Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins, and not one of them is forgotten before God? Indeed, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: you are of more value than many sparrows.
Matthew 10 verse 29

The words from the bible that inspired the name, Sparrows, the Aids village in Florida, west of Joburg

Where has all the money gone? And why, years? What else Julia's sister is grieving over.

This is the second part of the story of Julia and Peggy, two women buffeted by hardship – extreme poverty, cold, abuse, rape and being abandoned by the fathers of their children.

In the first chapter we told of their years of hope, when they were young and had many dreams, their beauty, and, most importantly, their health.

When we met Julia and Peggy four months ago it was midwinter and the bitter cold added to their

JULIA'S STORY

Time of The Curse and the people of the night

Julia's eyes glow. Her nipples in the sparrow her chest. There are only wrinkles where she flesh of her breasts used to be.

Her daughter, 20-year-old Elizabeth, helps her get off her shirt and her bra, unbuttons her socks. Julia stands naked.

A desperately cartilage is draped over her shoulders. Her sacrum, bluish in the cold, is a hollow cave between her legs. The large bones carry yellow scar tissue underneath healthy brown and cream-brown.

Her appearance has not substantially different from the tumors with the spoiler lips that her daughters remember.

Her vivid memory makes the shock bearable. Julia prostitutes to her malodorous. It's the peak of winter and even clothes can't keep the chill away.

Elizabeth has warned Julia's landowner one small fire in the kitchen stove.

Previously it was a case of Julia's neighbours have walking long distances to watch her chase men over cattle and with a wheelbarrow and a saw borrowed from a neighbour.

They were bribed in by what's dressed over the open wild behind it, along a well-worn path.

Elizabeth's story from their home in a squatter camp west of Johannesburg is a chronicle of loss, where they usually collect the wood. Elizabeth, in the other direction to the collapsed with a wobbly gait of Lucozade.

This is where small, brisk, green-clad female would. The roads are divided into sectors and quarantines. Everything is done. There is no place. No clock is running under our characters.

And on the same side of the road as Lucozade is Tshepang, the area where the shacks are. Here, by the shacks, are cardboard and bags of rubbish thrown out and left to rot in the sun.

Many days roll in the dust, and here with their friends of chronic sprawls around in the garbage.

Shacks made with sticks in the sun, talking, wasting away, dying.

Women collect sand with their hands.

Few of the children go to school because the parents can't afford to send them.

Julia's second child, 12-year-old Lydia, should be in high school but she can't afford the fees or the uniform to join the Emmerdale.

Lydia's younger brother Peter should be attending the Letlotlo Primary School but he is too hungry to go every day.

Around the tumble five days providing cornbeefs to the flies and making up games with his friend.

"Everywhere is poor," Elizabeth says.

Back in Vaalpanna, even Julia has been struggling to be fixed to the "shelters" covered in tents, bars, cooking or lamps are shrouded.

She has forsaken the used frame of her bed, held up by bricks and cardboard, for the floor because the biggest holes in her shack are near the bed.

The chief dog owners is acrid, her blankets and daughter stench.

Elizabeth's income is an old pairs of second-hand jeans and tracksuits by the Julia from the previous day rise in the air, and Bill Bath clown agents sprinkling across Julia's bedsheets on the floor.

Jane and she have displayed the food as well as the old shoes and curtains that hang as dividers to make two rooms.

Elizabeth is trying to be better her daughter. Malita, who is struggling but hasn't lost her body. The mother uses the toilet stress, and then prays for more.

From the floor Julia's spirit have woken me from the bundle of blankets as she watches Elizabeth. She asks tenderly about the blessing wind.

Elizabeth thinks it was some time in 1994 that Julia was eligible many.

It could have been this she started suffering from HIV, pneumonia, a condition often seen in people in the advanced stages of the disease. It's in this range that she views as safe to be train cells.

It's Julia's belief that this is the time when she was contracted her child her body, followed her close, soon her flesh and crossed a path to her head.

She began to use the "words of the night".

They walked through the walls of her shack and, in the edge, they took her hair as close to the movement, she would wake up with pains everywhere, vomiting, shivering, shaking every the demons she saw.

She stopped her children – Elizabeth, Lydia, Christopher and Peter – from coming from sleeping. Each gathering family functions. She believes witches had stolen her mother's "breath of the night" closer to scattering her.

She blamed her sorcerer on the neighbor – she whistled at her current lies.

The eldest she became, she has also could work, in the end, she stopped and there was no money for anything.

It's unclear for the children to talk about it now.

But the constant shouting and disturbing the entire family made Elizabeth plan to solve mother's witchcraft she felt broke.

"She got somewhere," Lydia said. Julia's likes to stay with me. She does go when she's angry with Peter and Christopher."

In the days of this year Elizabeth thought, and toward a mark in a shack two across the lines from Julia. She pays R35 a month for hers.

Elizabeth remembers Julia's sister a hunting for her mind, waking as her own with her sorcerers and mentors, then screaming when with lights and "beautiful and calling Elizabeth to keep them with her.

When Elizabeth finally moved, Julia, in a darkness of other nights or sorcerers, begged her not to leave.

"She said, 'Don't go. I'm a sorcerer child and it was only witches I was killing.' She said, 'I'm a I've found a princess only'." Elizabeth recalls.

In time Elizabeth had already given birth to Malita, who was now in the area.

Life continued just beneath the Julia. The same night here been a fantasy, but what things are bad.

The one thing she was real was Julia's rage.

Her children don't remember exactly when it happened, except that it was shortly before Easter.

Julia's ex-boyfriend is Malita. The children don't mention him by name. "That man" she finally allows him, always due to their behind Julia's attack.

They let her in as a person for telling him why. When Malita was released Julia didn't see or have anything to do with him. She he said everyone to work her –

Later Lydia told Peter were to go to the arch Elizabeth, while Christopher went to Julia's mother in Lenasia. But Peter and Lydia were left living with Julia in the time of the rape.

They hid under beds. Each washing television as a house at the end of Tshepang area. They like "Ice Ice Cream Bar", they say.

Their mother was sick as she was not work at all, just as she to now.

Malita was sitting outside Julia's attack when Peter's old him. His mother was sick. Malita was away.

Later that night he came back, and raped Julia with Peter in the bedroom.

"Peter was there. Two days he came out of the room that Neal was there" she is words with another can. He spoke as if she's talking about someone else.

She tried to persuade Malita to leave by telling him she was sick. He is man's work, he responded that she probably has Aids.

"I said 'If I have Aids why do you want to sleep with me?' He said if he pay extra how he'll take me, pills and together we'll be safe." Julia says, describing another about the suggestion that she had Aids she is also a the rape.

She never reported it – Elizabeth was Malita threatened to kill them if they did. Lydia is not lifted of him. Whenever she sees him she children in it – I can't see children," Julia says.

She puts she that down. She points to something Cora brought her which she could see – baby food.

"I did see in the bottle food. The bottle is the in the ground, it was mine," she says.

Julia looks forward to the times Neal Cora in her "Santa" (grandmother), a connection here to her. She says other is unhappy when she doesn't see Cora.

"I missed her so much. When I see her, I'm happy. When she doesn't come, my heart goes so sore," Julia says.

When the school weather is in no room. Cora doesn't sleep at night, sick with worry about Julia, alone in her shack filled with holes ...

TOMORROW:
They left her to her illness and her sleep

Against the wind

PHOTOGRAPHS: DEBBIE YAZBEK

the story of millions of women and their battle for survival

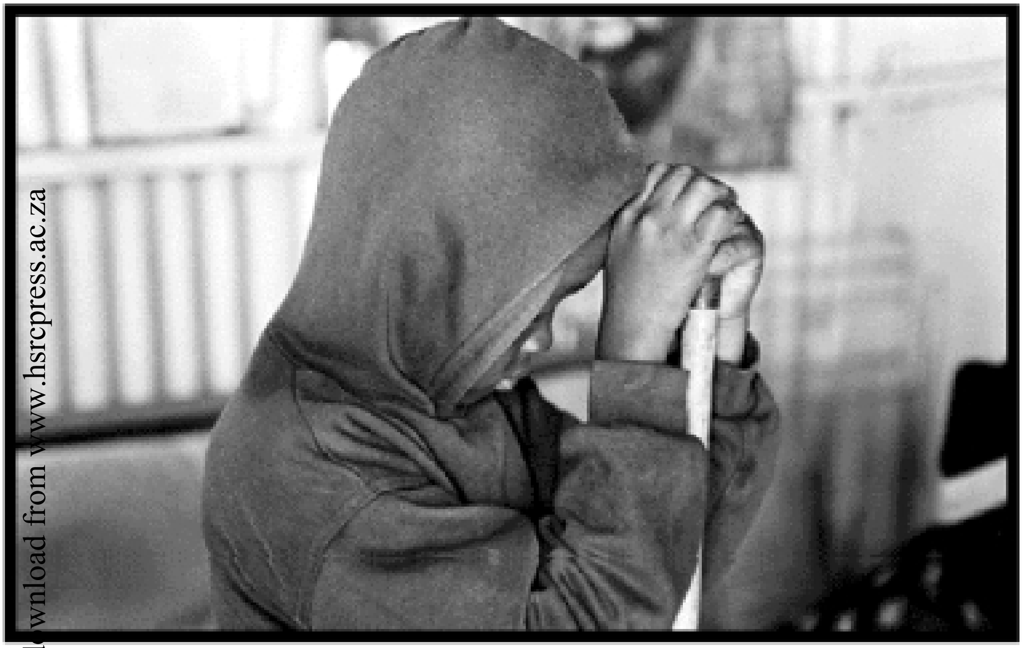
misery as they huddled in their draughty shacks.

Now, worse than all this: both women are seriously ill. Their memories are fading, neither can work, they are getting no care, and their families are falling apart.

And a remarkable friend who has entered their lives is convinced both are HIV-positive.

As they and their families battle towards a complete breakdown she persuades both to go to Sparrows Rainbow village, a Aids home and hospice.

There are millions of Julias and Peggies in our midst and this is their story, too.



PEGGY'S STORY

The son a mother wanted to become her mother

TOMORROW

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A fall of sparrows:

PART 3: We shall not forget Julia and Peggy, two ordinary

REPORT
KAUSHIK KALIDEEN

A WHITE HEARSE ... Julia's tiny final procession led by pink shirted her best friend. As the car left her mother's home for her last journey, she looked on, aware that she would never see her daughter again.

For only a penny you can buy two sparrows,
Yet not one sparrow falls to the ground
Without your Father's consent

Matthew 10 verse 29

– the words from the Bible that inspired the name, Sparrows, the Aids village in Florida, west of Johannesburg

And now we come to the last journey of Julia and Peggy, the two parents of our three kids. We want more than ever to tell their story – how much we will miss them. Our intention was to piece together the story of their lives, the good and bad times, of their years of beautiful and health and hope and love, and how this all changed with the sickness, abuse, rape and the bitter cold of their deaths in Carolina, a settlement 40 kms to the west of Johannesburg.

We had intended to end our three-part series with their story. But – of course, we couldn't write the script. Julia, we quit the script wrong.

JULIA'S STORY

Slowly, first in silence, and then in sleep, she slips away

Julia is sleeping in a pale of slippers from the park Hospital. Head, which stands high on a hill in the offbeat suburb of Mayfield near Johannesburg.

There, high up the two-storey HIV+ – that's HIV short – she's the child gives her entire daughter Elizabeth all her own month or two (Elizabeth).

Sometime, perhaps as a gift to charity, the slippers have made their way to Sparrows, and she now wears Julia's feet.

She wears it as Julia wears a baby blanket or my mother wraps cloth up like the ornamental children.

She has other mirrors, but her head propped to her head. She sees Julia's sleep around her eyes and the blood red lipstick on her lips since she's no expert in applying make-up.

"I think myself a bit nice," she giggles.

A tender smile spreads across her face. She looks up like a shy, vulnerable little girl and says: "Let me show you. You won't laugh?"

She pulls the waistband of her pants down to reveal a blue diaper.

"Oh, stomach runs me much, now it's a bit better. When I sleep I mess myself, but they give me this. They make me."

She either loses control, vomiting, sometimes shitting between urine and defecation, blaming the pill between the two.

At times it's one and another, in a row and what to do. At times her movements become unpredictable.

"When I'm bored, I look for a man. Now I'm sick, there's no need in my head. If you don't talk to me the blood will go to your head. If you don't, it runs inside. If the blood doesn't circulate, then you'll go dull."

When she was the centre of her world, here sparked she laughs and says: "I'm joking."

Cecile Bailey, an animal welfare worker, has arranged for Julia to be admitted to Sparrows. Sparrows Village in Florida, for 28 boys and girls.

Julia doesn't know why she is ill. She doesn't think she could be HIV-positive, because of the pills she takes.

Sparrows is run in terms and conditions placed forward Carlos Martinez, superintendent. Before, Carolina worked as a secretary with Sparrows, who is better with the terminally ill.

But despite the tough exterior, Martinez has the well-being of her patients at heart. She never ceases to amaze us and of care.

She chose the Aids hospice's name after a patient had said to her that no one would remember him after his death.

Martinez's words prompted him to ask: "You are against me dying on the ground, and God is aware of it, you are worth more than many sparrows".

Julia reclines that her mom lives in a shack and she laughs as it does. "Here, no, if it has equal significance, she tells Elizabeth that she is right from Julia.

"I'm going to the hospital and that, going to check in the ward if it's okay," she says.

That's the only time she mentions sisters, and Elizabeth only looks.

Though they have missed their mother, her children aren't here on social visit. The train carries each Julia that her own mother handed. Julia refuses to go to the funeral, but Elizabeth insists: "You must go and see it was your mother. It's the right thing to do."

At first, Julia expresses the funeral, has no close right vigil.

Lydia and Elizabeth look laugh and the other pictures. It's her ma, she's a bit sick, here." Elizabeth addresses her own head.

Julia asks her children if they have had to the house. Therefore. They didn't see the nurse morning, and when Christopher says he's hungry. Julia is threatened his sister's sandwiches to do.

She tells Elizabeth she doesn't get enough food to share with all of them.

Later Julia goes for lunch. While she's away her children watch the kids from the other house door join. They also tell her to wait her other time is here.

Maybe out of crying, it's already time when Julia and she hasn't eaten yet. Though she'd rather not. Elizabeth says it's time to leave. On their way here, Martin asks about the children's food parents and children.

At home in Lawley, Elizabeth plans to dress her mother's clothes are stacked in the one room, with the exception. Lydia is thrilled she has new "customers" dress. She plans to wear them for her grandmother's funeral.

On the day of her mother's funeral, Julia has to find clothing to herself. A skinny hand sticks out from under the blanket and moves as if she's asleep or something.

Lydia and one of the children's mother was very quiet, without a sister, mother – she was always talking.

"Sometimes you will meet sisters and hear her talking and you think she's talking to God or with us. But when we go, she's talking to herself," Lydia said.

It's not the first time she feels that been easier than between her children. In February she was admitted to Johannesburg Hospital with tuberculosis.

When she was released, she wanted her to that spoke to her mother's home in Lawley (no one) she couldn't bear the sun, they missed her, she's only there.

Julia told her daughters that they wouldn't be her with the heat in the house and the, sometimes, they would have to stay outside the little brick house.

That's only the doctor's visit on get back home for the funeral.

"Those people are bad to me," she says. "When I think what I have to go there, my heart goes pain."

Julia remembers sadly how his mother's sister moved in with a friend. "Jesus must take me. I'm sick of you. All you do is drink medicine and you get more. You must die."

When Julia is free with that she does have visits, she refuses to be here is.

She is taken to Alice Joseph Hospital for her results and plans both are confirmed long. Her's that she must be a Sparrows, she doesn't talk about it.

It's only when a month later' when Elizabeth, Lydia and their come back to visit – her she brings up. She tells them she's been told that she's HIV-positive.

"They say I have Aids. But it's not true. I don't know those things. I don't have the sores on my hand, and here on my hands."

Julia displays her skin fingers, which are clear of the skin infections that those with HIV sometimes get.

"The pain don't say much. "There's nothing we can do," Elizabeth adds.

She asks her mother what will happen to her if she dies in Sparrows. Lydia and Sparrows will look after her.

The girls agree to – to sell anywhere.

"If people find out they won't want them to play with their children anymore," Elizabeth says.

And it's the misunderstandings that Julia's sister moved into his mother being upset, who wants the door affected by the story.

As the children leave Sparrows, their last time a symbol from Lawley, Frederick, who teaches in the Sparrows crèche. Patience wants to know why Peter is not in school.

"You must go to school. Then we can going to get a job later?"

Peter says he travels just a time.

"Yes, that you to the gate. You don't do that." Patience admonishes.

Peter taps on his hands as her and walks his hands into a classroom.

Then the attendant reminds the diapers on the floor and no more talk, the boy crying because Frederick is wishing him, has the mark, much more.

And it isn't his sisters who comfort him, but Patience. Diapers or both, pulls him to his feet and hugs him closely to her.

Elizabeth and Lydia stand aside, not hearing of her sister for security back home. Elizabeth starts crying too, but Lydia begins to quiet her on her shoulder.

"We only have one mother," she says.

It has been clear from the moment Julia arrived at Sparrows.

And with her mind to accept some of the struggles of her adopted children. She tells her counsellors that she wishes to get well so she can return to her own people and support her children.

She tells counsellors that she has been.

She explains her conditions with her relatives, appears – sometimes saying three hallmarks of lunch – and always checks with her children's sister. Four she's saying she's pregnant.

But that's an understood saying, as, in some moments, she says she doesn't want to suffer anymore. She's not to die.

What happens next surprises everyone.

One morning, she gets up and goes to lunch. Inside minutes she has completed eating.

She says she doesn't want to go out of bed and is suffering from severe diarrhoea. Her counsellors rushing in panic to quiet it silence. Her roommates cry, but she don't drink much of it. Then later her or her sisters and her sibling.

After 4pm, when the nurse comes in to check on the patients, she notices Julia is dead.

At first she tried to silence. As she moved her life, the memories of her death were in an instant.

The last flight

women made extraordinary by their courage, love and spirit

PHOTOGRAPHS: BONNIE VAZIRI

The story of doctor who wants nothing and Peggy who gives up everything for her faith, perhaps for her children, perhaps for herself

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PEGGY'S STORY

Her name, too, will be put on the remembrance tree

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

In the editor's chair

Dennis Pather

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Let's make sure we understand one another from the outset. This isn't intended to be a practical manual on how to be an editor. No such manual has ever been written. Nor, I daresay, could it ever be. Editing is the sort of job you learn as you go along, based on hard experience and lots of time. Just like being a parent, in fact. What you're reading is a reflection of my own experiences 'in the chair' and what I have managed to harvest both professionally and personally from my career. I hope this helps give some idea to young and/or aspirant journalists what it is like to be the editor of a daily newspaper – the challenges, decisions, choices, quandaries and issues an editor must face (and resolve) on a daily basis.

Good editors are not born. They have editorship thrust on them by company managers who, for reasons best known to themselves, believe the appointee can be trusted to deliver a newspaper that is credible, palatable to the public and profitable – not necessarily in that order. What is lamentable, however, is that too many good journalists are lost as skilled journeymen when they take up an appointment as editor. You're hired as an editor, in many instances, on the strength of your ability and performance as a professional journalist. Once

Good editors are not born. They have editorship thrust on them by company managers who believe the appointee can be trusted to deliver a newspaper that is credible, palatable and profitable – not necessarily in that order.

appointed, however, you are required to perform virtually every other task except those that got you the job in the first place.

In my experience, few journalists view an editorship as a conscious career choice. More often, the profession chooses them. Some people dismiss it as a thankless task that confers little more than stress and prematurely grey hair. Yes, it does pay the rent, but you can stop dreaming about that penthouse on the waterfront. Yes, an editor can be influential, even powerful in a sense, but that can be your undoing if you allow it to go to your head.

Yes, you are invited to more media launches and cocktail parties than your constitution can cope with (80 per cent of the invitations you receive each week have to be declined politely or delegated to colleagues), but you'd be foolish to ignore your cardiologist's warnings about bad cholesterol.

Yes, you do get the opportunity to rub shoulders with influential and creative people and sometimes with notorious celebrities as well, but you also face the daily chore of dealing with loonies and cranks, disgruntled readers and outraged advertisers, abuse from high-ranking managers when they give vent to their dislike of what you have published. And let's never forget all those irate politicians who complain bitterly when the truth looks ugly in print.

The ultimate reward

If you are ever offered an editorship, you will probably accept the invitation for any one of a variety of reasons, not least the burning ambition to wear the ultimate crown on your long career path as a journalist. As leader of a team that participates in momentous and historic events, the editor's role and responsibilities are undoubtedly enormous – and can be hugely rewarding in the personal sense. You and your staff share an intimate sense of involvement in major issues of the day, not just in your writing, but also in your everyday judgments over such matters as content selection, which stories deserve prominence, which reports and pictures to publish and which to leave out. All these decisions, as relatively insignificant as some might seem, can ultimately have a significant bearing on shaping public opinion. And that carries a mighty responsibility.

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The first time you become an editor, you are inundated by an overwhelming sense of the possibilities open to you; the huge canvas you have been given to daub on as you will. It's a heady moment, but one quickly tempered by the realisation that, while you might have all this new power and opportunity at your fingertips, the whole endeavour is underpinned by a huge burden of responsibility as well. And that responsibility is to your readers, your staff, your employers and, ultimately, to yourself.

Above all – and this can be a huge buzz – when the working day is over and you know you've put out a really good newspaper, you get to relish that wonderfully satisfying sense of pride and achievement at having worked together as part of a well-drilled team.

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Trusting your journalists

One aspect often overlooked in the profession of journalism is the trust an editor places in the hands of his or her executive journalists, news desk, reporters, subeditors and photographers. An editor cannot be at all places all of the time, and therefore has to accept judgments taken by members of his or her staff on a regular basis.

South African-born lawyer and journalist Anthony Lewis once wrote that, in his experience, a reporter had very much more to do with the shape of a news story than any editor does. Obviously, editors do retain the power to edit out points of a story after the news has been gathered and written, but as Lewis points out, the real decisions – what facts to report and in what light to report them – are made by the reporters on the spot and in the heat of the defining news moment. Remember that the news can't wait too long. It has to be served piping hot.

First call-up

When I got my first call-up as an editor, it arrived in an impressively embossed envelope. You know, the sort that means you're either being invited to dinner with the chairman of the board or that you've just been fired. Happily, the letter inside was neither of these painful events, but an elegantly typed document on an official *Argus* newspaper company letterhead, informing me of my formal appointment as editor.

I read that letter nine times – just as I had read and reread my first bylined story many years earlier – naively dissecting every word as though it had been

personally composed for me, even though, of course, it was a standard form letter, identical right down to the carefully considered phrasing and the last full stop, to the letters delivered to dozens of other newly appointed editors before me and indeed ever since.

At the time, of course, none of this rationale crossed my mind. I was too elated for that. Recognition at last! After years of late-night duty, pre-dawn shifts, working weekends and public holidays, slogging on day in and day out in pursuit of the big story… and the small ones, too. It's all quite heady at first, certainly when your colleagues flock around you and you're at the centre of an orgy of congratulations and back-slapping.

Suddenly, the euphoria subsides and the reality of it all begins to sink in and you are bombarded by a flood of all-too-human doubts and misgivings. I'm in the hot seat. The plane's in flight and I'm the pilot. I'm not even sure I know how to land this thing. Am I ready for this? A whole gamut of daunting decisions lies ahead. What is your newspaper's market positioning (i.e. who you are trying to attract), what is its editorial stance and strategy (and do you plan to change it in any way)? What about the reader profile, about profitability, newspaper ethics, layout discipline, advertising revenues, legal conundrums, circulation stagnation, staff issues.

The first night's the worst. It gets better every day after that.

Taking decisions

So, you're thrown in the deep end. Sure, you're bound to swallow some water and gasp for breath at the outset, but there's really no need to panic. *Alles sal regkom*, as they say in the classics. And after you've passed the stage of cosying up to the chairman and promising your undying loyalty and eternal gratitude to the board of directors for your appointment, the next most important step is getting to know your new staff. After all, you'll want them working with you, not against you. It helps. Trust me.

I well recall that my first appointment as editor was not greeted with boundless enthusiasm and open-armed approval by the staff. They had been lobbying management for one of their number to get the job and had growled that they would only accept Pather's appointment over their dead bodies. Hardly the ideal welcome for a new editor to kick off a career.

With hindsight, the challenge that confronted me could not have been better timed – it was my first major poser and I had to make my first big decision.

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The choice facing me was fairly simple: should I indulge my detractors and attempt to win them over with my boyish charm and diplomacy or should I walk in poker-faced and, to be blunt, kick butt? I chose the latter and won the day. That was to set the stage for a career of decision-making. For that is what being an editor is all about – taking decisions. On your newspaper's strategy and its market positioning; decisions about content – whether a story is likely to offend a significant number of your readers or even a section of them, or whether you should go ahead and publish anyway, because you know the piece is in the best interests of the public.

Suddenly, the euphoria subsides and the reality of it all begins to sink in and you are bombarded by a flood of all-too-human doubts and misgivings. I'm in the hot seat.

The decisions never end. Can you afford to hire a private plane to cover a devastating flood? Will your newspaper infringe some law (no matter how unjust or obscure) if you publish? Does a particular headline accurately reflect the content of the story, or is it more a case of overblown wishful thinking designed to sensationalise a story more than it deserves in the hopes of attracting more readers?

The life of an editor is a veritable whirlwind of daily – often hourly – decision-making. Big decisions, small decisions, costly ones and, sometimes, very personal considerations as well. Don't ever believe you'll get every one right. No one is infallible. Aspire instead to take the best possible decision you can – under the circumstances. And remember, the editor's decision is always final. The buck stops with you.

Understanding your product

To achieve a clear understanding of your new product (and it's best you do so before you get down to writing your first word or making your first decision), remember that more minds are better than one. Hand-pick a group of people from various disciplines; ensure as wide a diversity of talent and viewpoint as possible – women and men, young and old, black and white. And, above all, try to select people with a passion for newspapers – a passion for truth and justice and a deeply ingrained belief in the public's right to know what's going on.

As convenor of this diverse group, strive always to ignite this great debate around your newspaper – its role, its positioning in the market, its readers,

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their preferences, the area in which you operate, your major opportunities, your threats, strengths and weaknesses. Once you have a clear (and regularly updated) knowledge of these processes, you will be able to use that knowledge to constantly refine and fine-tune – or even change completely – your newspaper to keep abreast of shifts, swings and groundswells in the marketplace.

If you don't know what's happening out there; if you don't know what your often-fickle readers want, or what trends or public mood swings they're reacting to, then you are doomed to failure. Adapt or die. We recently went through one such exercise with the *Daily News*, an afternoon newspaper in Durban. The process involved several weeks of intensive and exhausting round-table discussion, poring over reams of research data, followed by arguments that threatened to come to blows at times (passion does such things to people).

At the end of it all, we were blessed with a clear, overarching strategy for the newspaper: one that took into account the market we were dealing with and the ever-changing competitive environment in which we found ourselves operating. We knew quite clearly the demographics of our typical reader, and we set about defining identifiable human stereotypes which, to this day, everyone on the *Daily News* uses as a constant guideline to the sort of people we are trying to target and attract.

What had emerged at the end of our workshop was a proper understanding of what an ideal *Daily News* should look like – certainly in concept. The next task was ensuring we got it right in terms of content and packaging. I tell you all this just to illustrate how critical it is to properly and thoroughly plan your way ahead. Leave little to chance, conjecture or preconception. Believe me, strategising is an exact science.

Those weighty issues

After our deliberations, we were convinced the road to the future lay in creating a vibrant 'broadsheet tabloid' newspaper. Now that might sound like a contradiction in terms (and here I'm assuming you know the physical difference between the two types of newspaper) but, if the truth be told, a newspaper that was tabloid in tone and tabloid in physical format is what we would have preferred.

A tabloid is tighter, more compact, more manageable and lends itself to the sort of high-impact presentation and layout that tabloid journalism demands.

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It's more in-your-face, spunkier, livelier and refreshingly more irreverent than its dignified cousin, the broadsheet. But we weren't paying the piper, if you get my drift, so we had to shelve the ultimate plan, for the time being, at any rate. Meanwhile, back to that broadsheet tabloid of ours. Our collective thinking on the proper way forward was best encapsulated by a question posed at one of our strategy sessions by my colleague, Dave Mullany (a seasoned journalist who used to be to editor of *Scope* magazine).

He asked, somewhat provocatively, 'Where is it written that newspapers need to be serious, sober-minded, and let's be honest here, so downright pompous? That each and every edition, page after page, your newspaper must tackle the weighty issues and problems that beset our relatively infant democracy?'

These so-called weighty issues are without doubt important, some extremely critical, and need to be reported on and addressed. But are they what sells newspapers, especially when they tend to become mind-numbing by their very volume and predictability?

Is it what *Daily News* readers really want after a hard day's slog, when time is limited and precious and the lure of the little black box beckons? Is a preponderance of 'weighty issue' stories likely to send afternoon readers clamouring around the news-stands? Our chorus in response to these questions was a resounding 'No'.

We believed those weighty issues, depressing as they might appear at times, deserve our own concern and attention – but not at the threatened exclusion of everything else in the newspaper.

As Mullany explains: 'No one's to blame here… It's a sort of benign, well-meaning trap we have all fallen into. In our earnest attempts to redress the imbalances and injustices of the past, we have become obsessed with social upliftment, with setting matters right, with doing what we think is something positive to make South Africa a better place to be. Unfortunately, in the process we have lost sight of the very first role and function of a newspaper. And no, that core function is not to right wrongs, expose injustice, castigate the corrupt or uplift the downtrodden, although these things should, of course, form part of any newspaper's ultimate objective.

'Truth is, the principal function of a newspaper – any newspaper – is to stay in business. If you don't stay in business – by serving your market's needs and desires – then you will not be in a position to perform any of those laudable aims you have set yourselves.'

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Stimulate debate

Not everyone, I'm sure, shares our line of thinking and that's healthy in a profession in which part of our role is to provoke and stimulate debate. And what better issue to chew on than the one at the very core of our noble profession: the role of a journalist? Or better still, just what is journalism?

Of the many attempts at describing a good journalist over the years, the most memorable for me has been that of Thomas Griffith, a senior editor at *Time* magazine and a former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He put it this way:

> *A good journalist is a rewarding sight. He enters a trade where the pay is low – low at least for the qualities of intelligence, energy, experience, judgment and talent he must bring to it. He must have a zest for events, as accountants must love figures and carpenters wood. He must have a dedication to facts and a scent for humbug. He is probably by temperament an observer not a doer, standing outside of events, often in distaste, and must beware becoming, like a baseball fan, a heckler of plays that he himself could not have equalled.*
>
> *He must cultivate scepticism while avoiding cynicism. He must learn to cover people, meetings and causes for which he can have sympathy but must not display loyalty. He must learn to feel but not engage. He must be incorruptible; the temptation to be otherwise comes not from bribery, which is rare, but from a reluctance to pursue that kind of news which will go against the grain of his paper's views or his own convictions (it takes courage to give unpopular causes their due). He must be swift while also considered. He must go where he is not wanted and be resistant to those who are too welcoming. And, for all of this, his hours will be long, his pay inadequate and his standing in the community not particularly high. Newspapermen must warm themselves by their own fires.*

Quite perceptive and soberingly realistic, don't you think? Especially as Griffith wrote that in 1959. Not much, it appears, has changed in the intervening years.

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Changing roles

The role of an editor has changed dramatically in recent years. In the past, the emphasis was on dealing strictly with matters editorial. Advertising was the responsibility of the advertising manager and the circulation manager was accountable for newspaper sales and distribution, but the principal function of the editor was to create the best possible newspaper in terms of its content and design.

Times have changed. Today, newspapering skills are only part of the job profile of an editor. And while you don't necessarily need an MBA (yet), you will most certainly need a pretty good idea of how a business is run. Not only that, your employers will expect you to play a pivotal role in ensuring the business is not only sustainable, but also profitable as well.

What has changed dramatically over the past decade or so has been the demographics of our readers. Twenty years ago, many newspaper editors led relatively uncomplicated lives and faced far fewer challenges when addressing their markets. This was because most of their English-literate readers happened to come from a single community. They were, in a word, white.

Today, in a democratic South Africa, those demographics have been turned upside down. So, too, have the lifestyles – and the priorities – of potential readers. Like afternoon newspapers all over the world, the *Daily News* has also had to adapt creatively to cope with these fast-changing lifestyles and reading habits. We realised we had to produce a newspaper for the rush-hour reader, who, at the end of a long, hard day at the office, home or on campus, wanted the news packaged for easy consumption. They wanted their news and information presented in comfortable, easily digestible bites. Today, it is imperative that an editor has much more than a rudimentary understanding of other business techniques and disciplines as well. There are also occasions when the editor is obliged to join his or her advertising counterpart for courtesy visits to leading advertisers to keep the revenues ticking over, or for lunches with newspaper agents or supervisors to help the circulation along. Editing a successful newspaper is also about running a good business.

While we are dealing with the business analogy… As you are manager in the broadest possible sense, the twin demons of People and Production turn out to be your two main priorities. Try to maintain a healthy balance between the two. Too much of one at the expense of the other can prove dangerous, as I was to discover early in my career as editor when I tried too hard to be Mr Nice Guy, the editor who wanted so much to be loved that he did not know how to say 'No'.

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They called me 'Easy Touch' in the corridors. I was trying too hard to be a people's manager, and probably took my eye off the production side momentarily as a result. All that was needed was a slight but conscious adjustment of priorities.

It pays to listen

Editors are rarely experts in any field. But that doesn't stop them from pontificating about any subject imaginable. If it moves, comment on it! Readers have come to expect this of editors, anyway. Daily editorial comment serves to enunciate a newspaper's standpoint on current issues. However, while dishing out dollops of advice to all and sundry, we often lose sight of an important attribute for editors, indeed for all journalists. That is the need to *listen*.

Very few people do these days. Really listen, I mean. It takes keen concentration; it involves probing, asking relevant questions, showing sincerity, patience and compassion. Avoid the tendency to start formulating a mental response even before the full question has been asked. It calls for empathy, at times even disagreeing with something that is said, but always being consciously attentive and genuinely interested.

I have found the art of listening an invaluable tool when trying to disarm difficult callers. Be prepared to counter telephone calls and queries from a wide cross-section of people, from the mundane to the melodramatic. After all, you're in the game of communications, and as the editor, you're supposed to be Communicator Number One. So brace yourself for all manner of calls – from idle cranks who believe you're paid handsomely to listen to their drivel; those saintly souls who ring simply to thank you for something you've published (bless their hearts and send them straight to heaven); as well as those irate customers who insist on taking their complaints directly to the top. If the editor can't resolve it, then no one else will.

Like the dear old lady who rang one evening recently to solicit my help.

'Mr Editor, the youngster who delivers my *Daily News* normally throws it over my fence onto my front veranda. I think he was a bit too energetic today, and it's now sitting on my roof. Can you help?'

Don't allow this to scare you off, especially as an efficient personal assistant (and you would do well, like I did, to choose wisely here) will take care of most of these challenges quite competently on your behalf during normal office hours. The fun starts after the PA has left for home…

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Reporting for television

Joe Thloloe

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July 1994. We'd just had our first democratic elections when I shifted from the *Sowetan* to SABC's Television News Production. I'd been a print journalist for 33 years. A jungle of myths and mystique lay ahead of me; now, ten years later, I'm starting to get to grips with television journalism. This contribution is designed to cut a faster path for people who stand at the door of this craft and are wondering if they should knock and enter.

What story to tell?

The stories we tell are those in which the reader, viewer or listener will be interested, stories that have meaning for the viewer, those that affect him or her, and – most importantly – those that evoke emotions. List the news stories you remember from the previous week – in print, radio or television – and you will notice that these are the ones that touched your feelings, made you angry, sad, happy, amused, or made you feel the pinch of walking in someone else's shoes. The rest were just noise that cluttered past your attention.

Once you have reached the point where you are able to say, 'Yes, this is our story!' you may start your research. Is there anything in the archives or in the library on this story? Are there people I can talk to before I go out to interview the protagonists? These are crucial issues because the more you know about the story before getting out to do it, the better it will turn out. Well armed, you will be able to ask questions that give you a fresh look at a story when everybody else is boring the viewer with the obvious.

After your research you will have some idea of the story you want to tell – but don't rush out quite yet. First, write a sentence that tells the story: 'John refuses to bury his brother because a prophet has told him his brother will rise from the dead.' The sentence has a subject, a verb in the active voice, an object and, very important, the reason for the action. Average journalism answers the questions: Who? What? Where? When? Good journalism also answers the questions: How? and Why? Our sentence has action and emotion, the hopes of resurrection and the disappointment that the actor is obviously going to suffer. Unless you can sum up your story in one coherent sentence, it will be all over the place and will confuse the viewer rather than provide an understanding.

No other medium has the same power. Television requires that we use our senses of sight and listening, and the quality of pictures can make us salivate or virtually touch the people on the screen.

Go back to the sentence to clarify it by asking the W questions. Who is John? A farmer in the Free State? A butcher with a spaza in a shantytown outside Johannesburg? A father of two teenagers? A man who has recently converted to a new religion after a life of cynicism? You are searching for information that will best describe him, that will guide you in your filmmaking.

How has John shown his refusal to bury his brother? What has he told his family and friends? What has he said to the mortuary that is holding his brother's body?

You ask questions about the brother. Who was he? What killed him? How long has he been dead?

You also ask questions about the prophet. Who is he? Where did he come from? Is he an itinerant preacher who pitches tents wherever he lands? Has he made other prophecies you can trace?

As you ask these questions you are on the lookout for metaphors, for symbols that can tell your story well.

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The final written sentence that is going to guide your newsgathering is shared with the cameraperson and the video editor who you will be working with on the story:

'John, a sheep farmer in Hertzogville in the dry western Free State and a father of two teenaged boys, has kept his brother's body in a mortuary for 41 days because a prophet has told him he will rise from the dead.'

This sentence will guide you when you go into the field. The cameraperson will know what pictures to shoot and you will know what questions to ask. It will also help you structure your story when you finally tell it.

Television has the magic of taking the viewer to the scene of the story and making him or her a participant. If members of a trade union are marching in protest against their employer, the viewer joins the marchers, pushes and jostles and sings along with them. The viewer is there as the leaders hand over a memorandum of demands and he or she listens with colleagues to the response from management.

No other medium has the same power. Television requires that we use our senses of sight and listening, and the quality of pictures can make us salivate or virtually touch the people on the screen.

This magic is largely the work of the cameraperson. The reporter, on the other hand, also has to have a sense of 'visual grammar' – to know what an establishing wide shot is, what a close-up is, what a medium close-up is, or how to avoid crossing the line. The cameraperson and the reporter are partners on the story.

Deon Kloppers, one of the people who has been holding my hand as I learn about television, insists that camerapeople should look for the obvious, literal meaning of their pictures; the emotional meaning; the metaphors and symbolic meanings; and the suggestive meaning, in other words, what is left to the viewer to imagine as the outcome.

In the notes he prepared for e-TV staff, Deon says: 'An image, like narration, is a carrier of information. Images should engage and influence the viewer to think, believe, feel, and so on. Failing to recognise this causes the viewer to lose concentration and ultimately lose interest in the story.'

When Charlene and Eddie Stanley reported on the Free State family that was refusing to bury their father because of what a 'prophet' had told them, they demonstrated this.

Eddie, for example, shot on a windy day and his camera followed a clump of dry grass being blown down the deserted street. The sound of the wind

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gave the story an eerie feeling, and the chiming of the church clock told of time passing as the body was decomposing in the mortuary.

Natural sound, the everyday sounds at the scene, draws the viewer into the story.

The viewer also wants action rather than talking heads. If a police spokesperson describes how the robbers ran off into an alley and were cornered when they found there was no exit at the other end, ask him or her to walk the route as he or she describes what happened rather than just standing and talking to the camera. If you are interviewing a packer in a supermarket, allow him or her to continue working while talking to you. It makes the interview more natural.

Television has the magic of taking the viewer to the scene of the story and making him or her a participant.

When you do get a sound bite, a quote, from your subject, make sure you get a close-up showing the emotions or thoughts as they are reflected on the interviewee's face. A sound bite with dry facts and no emotion or thought is not worth the airtime.

When you start the process of storytelling, begin by selecting the shots you will use. An analogy would be a cartoon strip: first this shot, then that one, and so on. You also place your sound bites at their appropriate places.

Only when this story board has been done do you write your script, the words that will place the story in context, words to complement the pictures, not a repetition of what is already in the pictures, words that link pictures – words that bring understanding. We use fewer words in television, which means they have to be chosen with care. These are words the way we say them rather than written words intended for the eye when reading.

The script and the pictures then go to the video editor, who helps tell your story by producing television that will move the viewer. The editor follows conventions that help draw the viewer into the story and make him or her part of the action. It has to be a seamless welding of pictures, sounds, words that, together, can be as effective as poetry. Instead of using 500 words to describe a scene, the editor uses, for example, just one shot that takes the viewer to the scene. Instead of 100 words to describe how a mother broke down talking about her sick child, she shows us her tears and gets the viewers to want to throw their arms around her.

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Dispelling the myths

It is poor journalism that has given birth to the myth that television is shallow. It's the journalists who don't know what stories they are telling, who don't do research, who thrust microphones in front of talking heads at media conferences who give television journalism a bad name. If the message is layered intelligently, and challenges both our intellect and our senses, it is possible to say more in just one minute and 30 seconds than it is in 1 000 words of print.

Another prevailing myth is that only the vain and empty-headed can make it into television journalism – what with all those concerns about good looks, and make-up artists hovering around.

Obviously, your voice and the way you carry yourself are important storytelling tools. Dull people with dull voices who tell even interesting stories dreadfully will not make it. Interesting people who can carry a story are in great demand.

With basic training in journalism it is possible to switch to television news. You will, however, still have to learn the language and the tools of television. It's these that have wrapped television journalism in myth and mystique but with the lightning advances in technology in recent years, it is getting easier to wrap your arms around – at least enough to be able to tell good stories that bring understanding.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Reporting for radio

Pippa Green

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Shortly before the 2004 elections, I tuned into the radio news bulletins of the South African Broadcasting Corporation and learnt that six suspects had escaped from a court on the West Rand. They had been handed guns from the public gallery and had made a run for it. In the wake of the scuffle, a shocked magistrate told a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) reporter the suspects weren't handcuffed in court because the Constitutional Court had ruled that this was a violation of their rights. The story duly ran on our late-evening and early-morning news bulletins. I was ill at home at the time and wondered (too idly perhaps) whether this was so.

My wondering stopped abruptly when an unfailingly courteous, but clearly irritated Judge Pius Langa, Deputy President of the Constitutional Court called me to say that the Court had made no such ruling. What worried him, he told me, is that if the news went out on radio, hundreds of court officials across the land may think they would have to unhandcuff dangerous suspects. Working through the remote of a cellphone, I called our bulletin desks to explain the

The most important lesson for aspirant radio journalists is that radio news hinges on credibility. To sustain that, one needs accuracy. Easier said than done in an age, and medium, where swiftness is everything.

error and ask them to correct it. The point, I said, is that suspects may be handcuffed in court and the Judge was concerned that many may think otherwise.

The 'correction', however, simply compounded the original error. Judge Langa, we reported, says suspects *may* be handcuffed in court. Another bulletin, another call from the Judge. The point, he said, is that the Constitutional Court had made no ruling on the matter. It had not considered the matter. The escape from Roodepoort had nothing at all to do with any Constitutional Court ruling.

Eventually we all got it right, but it pressed home the lesson to me of two things: the critical importance of Radio News and thus the strong burden of credibility that rests on it.

Also, it showed that the great strength of news on radio – its swiftness – can also be its undoing. In a newspaper, there is the luxury of reading copy (in one language) usually well before deadline. Radio deadlines can be, at best, half an hour; at their tightest, five minutes. The pressure to be first is both the tyranny and the joy of the medium.

Thirdly, it spelt a lesson out about sources. The sources for the story seemed credible enough: a magistrate and a state advocate. But combine a reporter used to hitching rides on police helicopters and navigating war situations with erroneous information given in the heat of the moment by frustrated, and probably frightened, court officials, add bulletin desk editors on deadline, and you have a recipe for disaster.

The fourth lesson – one that is perhaps more arcane – is that the media, to a large extent, tends to think in terms of clichéd narratives if they are unsure of the facts. So, sure, the Constitutional Court had made several decisions in the weeks preceding the escape, one of which was to allow prisoners to vote, which gave credence to the narrative that it was too 'liberal'. How like it, then, to bar the handcuffing of dangerous suspects in court?

But the most important lesson for aspirant radio journalists is that radio news hinges on credibility. To sustain that, one needs accuracy. Easier said than done in an age, and in a medium, where swiftness is everything, where the competitive pressures are great and where, in the case of the public broadcaster, the terrain of news is politically so hotly contested. But this is

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precisely why it is crucial to maintain high editorial standards, including editorial independence.

The reach of Radio News on the public broadcaster dwarfs any other medium in South Africa, although television news comes a close second. Consider the scope: the SABC produces some 24 bulletins a day in 13 languages (the 11 official languages, plus two San languages in the Northern Cape;) its News Division also produces about 36 hours of current affairs a day, again in 13 languages. Although it is a unified division, it is decentralised and diverse, with ten newsrooms around the country, 17 bulletin desks (14 for the Public Broadcast Service [PBS] stations and three for the SABC's commercial stations) and current affairs programmes on 14 stations.

And Radio News reaches into every corner of the country. Between 15 and 18 million people listen to our bulletins and current affairs shows in every language. Our news is what they rely on for information. As it is the essence of information, in many ways it is the essence of democracy too.

Our reporters are called on to do what few other reporters are obliged to do. File first and quickly, in English and then a second language. File sound bites and updates for the following bulletins. Then file more in-depth reports, with sound, for our current affairs shows in at least two languages. And do it right.

When the SABC political team covered the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the mid-1990s, our radio team would be at their desks long after the print and television journalists had filed, packed up and gone to the bar. There would be evening bulletin copy to be written, reports for the evening current affairs show, sound bites to be filed, morning bulletin copy and morning shows to be served. And always in more than one language.

Being a radio reporter is perhaps the most taxing of journalistic jobs, yet ironically they are among the most marginalised in the profession. Partly, this is because of our history. Many tend to report in languages that the urban elite, so well represented by the print media, ignores. And they tend to be based in provinces that are well out of the social mainstream. Yet, in some profound ways, these reporters are tracking the changes and climate of our country more thoroughly than their print or television counterparts. This is because public broadcast radio has the capacity for depth as well as for speed.

If a newsroom is well organised, it can beat any medium – except, perhaps, the commercial radio stations – to the big obvious stories: the arrival of Haitian president Aristide, for example, or the appointment of a new Cabinet. But public radio can do something more original too: it can find the stories

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that no one else has looked for and tell them in ways that invoke a sense of atmosphere and place through the use of sound that print, unless the writing is brilliant, fails to do. We have the scope to do this because, combined with our hourly bulletins, we have current affairs shows on all our PBS stations, even in the two San languages, !Xhu and Khwedam, in the Northern Cape.

Take for example the pre-election programming we ran on all our current affairs shows focusing on a different province each week. Our reporters around the country were encouraged to find the stories that captured the changes in their provinces over the past ten years. It meant they had to abandon press conferences and functions and turn their microphones away from politicians towards ordinary South Africans. Between them they told remarkable stories: the story of a black entrepreneur in Phokeng, near Rustenburg, who has soared to success on the wave of the platinum boom; a story of the layered history of Mapungubwe, site of the ancient African kingdom near the Limpopo River, from which its Venda descendants were finally and forcibly removed by the 1913 Land Act; a story of how new roads have changed lives in the former mountain 'bantustan' of Qwa Qwa; a story about the *karretjie* people – sheepshearers who live on their donkey carts – from the Northern Cape.

It may be a pipedream in our current economic climate but if we want to balance the constitutional right to know with the huge societal value in telling our collective stories, we have to invest more in journalism.

The sound told the stories: the old Venda woman singing of the pain of removal from her Mapungubwe roots, or Fikile, the real-life son of the woman depicted as 'Poppie' in Zakes Mda's novel, *Madonna of Excelsior*, lighting a cigarette as he told our reporter about the difficulties of growing up with a half-white sister in a town traumatised by apartheid's Immorality Act.

So the obligation on a radio reporter, as well as being fast and accurate, is also to be a great storyteller.

Increasing commercialisation is putting what should be one of the greatest contributions to journalism under threat. Until the 2005 Budget allocated R400 million for new technology over a three-year period, the public broadcaster received less than one per cent of its funding from government, yet it has onerous public broadcast obligations. News is expensive in any langauge. In 13 it is particularly so. So the pressure is on the stations that advertisers see as lucrative, such as SAfm and RSG, to conform to the culture of their

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commercial counterparts. Armies of foreign consultants have invaded the SABC in the past decade, suggesting all manner of changes, some of which have been good, but most of which have been unworkable in a country as diverse and new as ours. The latest batch wanted us to scrap all our current affairs programming on SAfm and turn our news shows into talk shows. The main reason is not perhaps that talk shows add a lot of value, but probably because talk is cheap. One good presenter in the studio, a couple of good producers and, apart from the usual overheads, the costs are covered.

Talk shows are an important part of radio (although I would argue they do not belong in Radio News), but the major problem with them is that they risk confusing opinion with information. Recently, at the height of the clashes between Xhosa-speakers and people of Mozambican origin outside Rustenburg, our current affairs show on Motsweding opened the lines for discussion and those who called in spewed forth dollops of xenophobia and racism. Is this news? I doubt it. Journalism, as craft, needs to research and tell stories in structured, accurate ways.

Where we have opened lines successfully – such as the After Eight Debate, which we run on SAfm – we structure topics, invite experts into the studio and have an incisive presenter who questions the clichés and myths that would otherwise go out on air unadulterated.

It may be a pipedream in our current economic climate but if we want to balance the constitutional right to know (or its counterpart, freedom of expression) with the huge societal value in telling our collective stories, we have to invest more in journalism and journalists to make it work. This is the responsibility that comes with our freedom.

So what are we looking for in aspirant Radio News journalists? Not much: accuracy, swiftness, depth, background, linguistic abilities, storytelling skills, technical know-how and, above all, commitment to making the public broadcaster a reliable purveyor of news. A good voice also helps. Radio News is the baseline of news in South Africa. If we get it wrong here, if we allow ourselves to become political or commercial footballs, the South African public, as well as our counterparts in print, will be the poorer.

The challenge for young journalists coming into the media is to make news credible, to make it interesting, to enable the whole country to hear the country and the world so they are informed citizens. Anything less would undermine our democracy.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

The role of the public broadcaster

Ruth Teer-Tomaselli

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‘Public service broadcasting’ is a frequently used, but seldom understood term. There are two main usages for it. Firstly, in the area of *regulation* the term is used to differentiate between other systems (usually ‘commercial’ and ‘community’). Secondly, as a normative category, it is used as a guiding principle to indicate the way in which broadcasters *ought to act*, whether or not in real life they actually achieve the high-minded goals that are implied in the idea of public service broadcasting.

However, the ways in which the term has been used over the years are very elastic, fitting into the needs and challenges of different countries at different times. Thus, the idea of public broadcasting is highly contested, with very little agreement as to what it really stands for.

The history of public service broadcasting

Public service broadcasting has often been considered staid, static and immune from change. In reality, however, the history of broadcasting technology, and broadcasting institutions, has always been a history of transition. Until the 1980s, the concept was a relatively stable one, with a widely agreed set of meanings. However, changes in the broadcasting landscape have come about so dramatically since then that the original set of meanings now seems hollow. Thus, to understand the nature of the present (and crucial) transitions in South Africa and other countries modelled on the 'public service' formula of broadcasting, it is necessary to go back to its origins and ethos, and consider some of the crises it has faced, particularly in more recent years.

Globally, there are two main logics around which public broadcasting has been organised – what I shall call the 'Commonwealth and European' model, and the 'American' model. In the United States, South America and some South East Asian countries, broadcasting has been a commercial enterprise from the beginning, and large commercial networks, together with a grid of smaller, independent or community-based television stations affiliated to some degree with the networks, have been the norm. The American model sees the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) as the poor sister of the big commercial networks. The latter are giant megaliths premised on the liberal theory of a free press, which assumes that the market will provide appropriate institutions and processes of public communication to support a democratic political system. In this paradigm, a clear connection is made between economic freedom and the freedom of ideas. In fact, there are those among supporters of the free market philosophy who believe that only the market can ensure the necessary freedom from state control and coercion. Therefore, any system of broadcasting that is supported by the state, in whatever form, is seen to be open to abuse and possible censorship or propaganda.

Against this background, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in the United States was created only in 1967, with a limited mandate and no national funding mechanism. 'Public' television in the United States has been notoriously underfunded and neglected when compared with the commercial stations. Radio stations in the United States were loosely aligned to networks, with a predominance of commercial stations interspersed with community-based broadcasters. Many of the first 'public' radio stations, established from the early 1920s, typically at colleges and university campuses across the nation,

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were non-commercial 'educational' stations. It was only in 1970 that the system of public broadcasting was formalised; even then, it was seen as a facilitation of independent stations, rather than a coherent system of national broadcasting. The fragility of the 'network' is evident from the numerous times the organisation has found itself close to bankruptcy, and the realisation that at any one time, less than two per cent of American households have their dial turned to a National Public Radio (NPR), PBS or educational channel.

In Europe and the commonwealth countries, broadcasting began under quite different historical circumstances, and therefore from a very different set of premises to those guiding the American experience. Public service broadcasting in southern Africa owes its genesis to the colonial heritage of the commonwealth model. In these countries, public service broadcasting typically preceded the commercial networks, and initially, at least, was given precedence over them.

The tradition of public service broadcasting is strongest in Britain, embodied in the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) under the direction of the first Director General, John Reith. Reith also wrote the founding documents for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in 1933, as well as the Charters for the Canadian, Australian, Indian and Kenyan broadcasters, amongst others. There is thus a strong formalist similarity among these broadcasters, and public broadcasting principles are still referred to as 'Reithian principles'. Reith argued that the radio wave spectrum, or Hertzian radio waves, was a scarce resource, and should therefore be developed and regulated in the interests of the nation. This implied a monopoly situation, which would only be acceptable if it were publicly owned and stood equally free from political forces – the government in particular – on the one hand, and various private economic interests, on the other. Consequently, it should be financed by a licence fee, and not by advertising, since this would imply that broadcasters would have to pander to commercial interests, something that was an anathema to him. To this day, the BBC has no advertising, while in South Africa, broadcasting was advertisement-free until the advent of Springbok Radio in 1956. At present, the SABC receives only 5 to 8 per cent of its income from licences, and about 3 per cent from the government (mostly for specific educational programmes). More than 85 per cent of its income comes from advertising – a very different situation to half a century ago.

Given that even public broadcasters rely heavily on advertising – the hallmark of commercial broadcasting – why is it necessary to have a public broadcaster at all; why don't we simply rely on market forces? There are

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A public service broadcaster needs to provide information to citizens rather than to consumers. The public broadcaster should provide a broad range of high-quality programmes on the basis of universal access for every citizen.

several reasons why the market-led philosophy is inadequate to provide for a service as important as broadcasting, particularly in a developing country. Public service broadcasting can, and does, redress market failure. Typically, markets don't produce sufficient quantity or quality of programming in education, research, children's programming (other than cartoons), dramas in minority languages and other specialised programming. Certainly, there are benefits for commercial companies in producing this kind of material, but they are not immediately profitable. An examination of the schedules of any 'commercial' broadcaster will reveal a serious neglect of these kinds of programmes. In short, markets don't work fairly – they don't provide for the poor, the old, the undereducated or for those who live in remote areas, far away from the urban centres.

There is no single definition of what constitutes a public service broadcaster. Nonetheless, the mandate of a public broadcaster can be summarised by three overlapping rubrics: broadcasting as a public utility, broadcasting in the public sphere, and broadcasting in service of the public audience.

Broadcasting as a public utility

A public service broadcaster is required to provide a service to the whole of the national audience, regardless of geographic distribution, in return for an annual licence fee.

In every country, certain basic requirements are provided as 'public utilities', such as the provision of electricity, water, basic education and medical care. In this sense we are speaking of a service that is provided to citizens at no profit, or possibly even on a subsidised basis, and which provides an absolutely necessary social service, as opposed to any luxury that can be purchased with discretionary income. The closer the state is to a social welfare ethos, the more emphasis is placed on the provision of these necessities. In order to deliver these services, parastatals, or state-owned enterprises (SOEs), as they are known, were set up to establish and run the relevant networks and infrastructures for delivery. In terms of this paradigm, broadcasting is seen as a public necessity. This implies that it is the responsibility of the national broadcaster to provide

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and maintain a universal access network capable of delivering broadcast services across the country. This can be seen a technical requirement of the broadcaster.

The SABC was first licensed in 1936, and followed this model very closely. Of course, at that time, it provided radio services only. Initially, it was aimed to cater for the needs of the English-speaking white population, but programming in Afrikaans followed. Programming in African languages was instituted only in the late 1940s, on an experimental basis at first, and then more widely in the 1950s. By 1960 'Radio Bantu' was a fully fledged service in a number of different African languages. Radio transmitters were set up across the country, not only in the urban areas where there was a ready market, but also in the rural areas, where it was expensive to lay out network facilities. When television was introduced in 1976, the SABC was responsible for ensuring that a signal could be received throughout the country. At present, there are three terrestrial television channels – that is, channels that can be received directly through the airwaves. Between them, they cover the vast majority of the country's surface area, although not all the channels can be received everywhere. To compensate for this, SABC television is also broadcast on an analogue satellite system called Irdeto, which is very much cheaper to use than the more expensive commercial digital system used by DSTV, which also carries the SABC channels. In this way, it is possible for all potential viewers and listeners to at least receive a signal.

Until 1995, responsibility for the network was an integral part of the work of the SABC, but after that date the signal distribution department of the Corporation became a separate company under the name of Sentech.

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Broadcasting in the 'public sphere'

A public service broadcaster needs to provide information to citizens rather than to consumers. The public broadcaster should provide a broad range of high-quality programmes on the basis of universal access for every citizen.

The public service broadcaster must work in the public interest in order to provide reliable, legitimate news, information programming and education. In its political output, it is obliged to be balanced and impartial, distanced from all vested interests, particularly those of the government of the day. It should be an independent public body with a high degree of financial policy-making autonomy from both governmental and commercial sources.

The purpose of commercial broadcasters is to make money. The purpose of the public service broadcaster is to provide a space in which people are able

to receive information about, and to discuss and debate, issues of importance to a political community, all of which enables them to participate in society as informed citizens. Public broadcast services are seen as ideal forums through which to provide just such essential information and democratic debate. Of crucial importance is that there should be a wide range of discussion and political viewpoints, not dominated by particular political interests. All segments of the society should be able to have a voice, so that the citizenry of the country are able to make informed choices regarding their own social well-being. Thus, all public service broadcasters, including the SABC, invest a great deal of their resources in news bulletins and documentary programming. Feedback is important as well – through phone-ins on radio programmes, mail and the right to reply.

Public interest is not necessarily the same as political interest, rather it is the chance for ordinary people to receive unbiased information, and be able to give voice to their own concerns, not simply the concerns of the politicians. Recently, the premier of Gauteng, Mbhazima Shilowa, addressed an editorial meeting of the SABC, and reminded them that the public broadcaster had a critical role to play in deepening democracy and in giving a voice to ordinary people. 'This includes enabling citizens to hold the government accountable and indeed giving government an opportunity to account to citizens in a manner that is not always subject to the dictates of commercial news values,' he said (quoted in *Sunday Independent*, 11 July 2004).

Broadcasting to serve the public as audience

A public service broadcaster must put the needs and aspirations of the listeners and viewers at the top of the agenda. The broadcaster ought to make a significant contribution to creative production, favouring original productions, and seek to give value and prominence to national, regional and world cultural heritage.

Public broadcasters the world over have a statutory requirement to educate and inform, as well as to entertain the audience. This is translated into a commitment to balanced scheduling across the different programme genres. Thus, one institution is required to cover the full spectrum of the public's needs and tastes.

Since so much programming shown on television is syndicated from overseas, particularly America, the public broadcaster needs to compensate by

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protecting and promoting local productions made in the home country. The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), the broadcasting and telecommunications regulator, sets down very exacting quotas for local content for all broadcasters, but the SABC, as the public broadcaster, is required to showcase the greatest amount of local content.

The crisis in public service broadcasting

By the 1980s, globally, public service broadcasting as an institutional form was suffering a historic mid-life crisis, an inability to change with the requirements of changing circumstances. Historically, public service broadcasting has been very powerful, and any redirection of the organisational structure and ethos of such institutions has been very difficult. The assault against public service broadcasting has come from at least five directions: market forces; new technologies; rising costs; undermining the development and nurturing of national culture as the mainstay of public broadcasting; and the attack on impartiality and political independence. In the next few paragraphs, this chapter will consider each of these, and how they affect the situation in South Africa.

Market forces

Market forces and deregulation of the airwaves in large part have been the logical outcome of the period of late capitalism, in which there has been a general disenchantment with social-democratic economies. Furthermore, there is an ideological position that takes the point of view that innovation is strongly associated with the private sector. Against this background, public service media is seen as the 'undead' – while it is limping along, it won't die. The popular opinion is that it is not innovative: it doesn't produce new programme genres, and the tone is 'old-fashioned'. In short, in many countries, particularly in Western Europe and North America, the tide of ideas has turned against public sector broadcasters.

At the same time, the growth in free market sentiment has broken the monopoly of public broadcasters and entrenched competition by considerably increasing the number of programme outlets (both on and off air). Now, in almost every country, there are private commercial channels, cable services and satellite broadcasting transmissions that provide a range of programmes catering for various tastes.

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In South Africa the SABC held a virtual monopoly position until M-Net was started in 1986 by a consortium of newspaper owners. The print media, under the leadership of Nasionale Pers – a huge Afrikaans language press house – felt that the SABC monopolised far too much of the advertising revenue in the country. The government of the time agreed, and M-Net, a subscription service delivered to high-income households through an encrypted broadcast system, was licensed. In 1995, the M-Net parent company introduced a digital satellite service, or DSTV, not only in South Africa, but also across the African continent, utilising the C-band on PAS4. With this delivery via satellite, the bouquet of channels was significantly enlarged. However, subscription television is accessible to only a small number of wealthy people. More crucially, the SABC must now compete with e-TV, which was introduced in 1998 as a free-to-air channel that can be received in all the major urban areas and much of the rural hinterland as well. Deregulation in radio took two paths: the first was the forced selling off of four highly profitable commercial radio stations in 1995, and the second was the licensing of new 'greenfields' radio stations from about the same time. In addition, there are over 60 functional community radio stations in South Africa.

For the first time in history, as a result of digitalisation, there is more spectrum and more space for transmission.

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New technologies

Technological change has gathered speed exponentially in the past 20 years. For the first time in history, as a result of digitalisation, there is more spectrum and more space for transmission. That is, the airwave space available to broadcast radio and television terrestrially (as opposed to through satellite) is vastly increased, and the public broadcaster can no longer claim the right to be the only broadcaster. Taken together, market-led deregulation and technological advancements have led to a proliferation of viewing opportunities and this, in turn, leads to three pertinent results for public service broadcasters.

Firstly, it fragments and segments the market. The broadcaster shares audiences with a number of other providers, as audiences migrate to commercial channels, leaving the rationale of the public service in question. It is no longer possible to speak of a 'public sphere', or a 'national experience' in which the whole nation is able to share the same programming and the same perceptions. (Actually, given the very heterogeneous nature of the South African public, it

is unlikely that such a scenario would ever have taken place.) Nevertheless, the audience is now more fractured than ever. Secondly, in the case of those broadcasters who are reliant on advertising revenue rather than government grants or licence fees, the additional competition drives down revenue. This leads to the third consideration: in order to attract audiences, the SABC, and other broadcasters that rely on advertising, provide more and more entertainment programme, much of it very similar. Sitcoms, soap operas, reality programming, quiz shows – these are the formats that 'drive' audiences and attract advertisers. The result is, paradoxically, that the more competition public broadcasters have, the more likely they are to imitate commercial broadcasters in terms of the kind of programming they provide, and the less they are able to function as public broadcasters with a wide diversity of programming and information.

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Rising costs

In financial terms, income has slowed down, and the international trend is that income does not keep up with inflation. The SABC is only too aware of the problem: the poor financial position has been cited as the biggest single crisis facing the corporation for several years. The largest proportion of revenue derives from advertising, and there is only a finite pool of advertising revenue, which not only shrinks in an economic downturn, but must also be shared across all media (print, broadcast, outdoor, below-the-line promotions, as well as e-TV, M-Net, DSTV and commercial radio stations).

Overhead costs for public broadcasters have increased worldwide, since public service organisations have built up, and are continuing to build up, vast broadcasting empires. In this respect the SABC is the same as television channels across the world – it has introduced second and third channels (SABC2 and SABC3), and extended broadcasting hours into the late night and 'breakfast time'. The volatile value of the rand on foreign exchange markets has meant that the import of equipment, technical spares, along with programme purchases, payments to news agencies and overseas correspondents has frequently cost more than was budgeted.

Most crucially, production costs are enormous. Technological advances tend to favour the large scale over the small, the mass product over the minority. It is characteristically cheaper to buy in product than produce it locally, which is anything from ten to twenty times more expensive. This has

led to the importation of a large proportion of programmes, resulting in fears of cultural domination by American product.

Developing and nurturing national culture

The development and nurturing of a national culture, creativity and identity is a major concern for many countries that have difficulty in maintaining a high level of local television content, which is expensive to produce. Globalisation has meant that, to a great extent, individual countries have experienced a loss of control over programme entry. Many countries have thus chosen to subsidise educational and culturally valuable television in order to support regional, minority or national culture. A second line of attack has been to impose quotas of local production requirements on broadcasters. This has been done in Canada, for example, while similar quotas have also been legislated in the European Union. Indeed, arguing for the principle of 'cultural exception' that is a result of the 'sensitive' nature and special characteristics of cultural industries, the European Union refused to include audiovisual services, including films, radio and television in the liberalisation agreements of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This has allowed countries within the European Union to impose regional (pan-European) and national controls, restrictions and requirements on television programming in the public sector.

The SABC's mission statement includes a call to reflect the reality of South Africa to itself. Through restructuring and reconfiguration, as well as the increased amount of local content – a process not without its financial and logistical contradictions – the SABC has attempted to fulfil this mandate. Despite its cost, local programming is seen to be essential to the project of protecting national identity and national culture, as well as providing for the diverse language needs of the audience. As a means of achieving its policy goals, the regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (now incorporated into ICASA), prescribed specific conditions with regard to programming, including the broadcasting of local programming during both the daily schedules and prime time. Different quotas were set for the commercial channels to that of the SABC since, it was argued, the latter had to carry higher local content obligations to meet its specific mandate as a public broadcaster.

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Impartiality and independence

Technological advances tend to favour the large scale over the small, the mass product over the minority. It is characteristically cheaper to buy in product than produce it locally…

Impartiality and political independence, especially in the area of news and information, is a particular vulnerability for public service broadcasting worldwide. The media in general, and television in particular, are no longer conceived of as 'mirrors' of reality, but rather as providing a heavily selected interpretation of events, one that structures reality for us, that shapes and frames a world for us to inhabit and accept as real and legitimated. In other words, the presentation and selection of news sets the agenda in which we are led to discuss the terms of our lives.

Media and political analysts regard television as a core political and ideological institution of any society. While it would be too simplistic to suggest that television creates a political climate, it is generally accepted that television does select and reinforce elements in the social and political structure that legitimate and reinforce existing elements in society, thus reinforcing the world views of the politically and economically powerful.

The SABC's news divisions, both on radio and television, remain hotly contested areas of public debate. Critics contend that the broadcaster is 'a mouthpiece for the government' and that 'the bulletins from the Corporation … have become sterile, reflecting government views more closely and more positively' (*Sunday Indpendent*, 11 July 2004). The Media Monitoring Project cited in the same report found that 35 per cent of all stories on the SABC news were about the government, compared to 25 per cent on e-TV, and that 44 per cent of stories on SABC3 featured the government in a positive light, as compared to 28 per cent on e-TV. This slant is seen as indicating a less critical and more sycophantic relationship between the government and the broadcaster.

The central question here is the relationship between the broadcasting institution and the state, and the ways in which the latter is able to circumscribe the agenda and autonomy of the former. Putting aside the SABC for the moment, we see that the success of the claim to political independence depends on:

- the willingness of politicians to abstain from interfering with the day-to-day running of the corporation;
- the ability of broadcasters to resist such interference by remaining in control of the reporting and analysis of news and current affairs; and

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- public confidence – the acceptance by both pressure groups (reviewers, commentators, political analysts, academics) and the 'general public' (in most countries, voters and taxpayers) that the broadcasting service is indeed independent.

The independence/impartiality couplet is a particular ideological construct of the public broadcasting ethos, and has never been applicable to all countries, even those in Western Europe. Numerous examples attest to the fallibility of the 'arm's-length' relationship between the government in power and the national broadcaster.

A reinvention of public service broadcasting?

If public service broadcasting is to escape being a quaint relic of the past, what can be done to improve it? In many countries, public service broadcasting is enormously popular. Often this is because there is little choice, since the commercial sector is undeveloped, or available only to a small minority who can afford it. In other, mainly developed countries, public broadcast services often drop to less than 50 per cent of market share. While it is true that in socio-economic terms, these broadcasters command the most demographically significant audiences in terms of wealth, education and power, public broadcasting is frequently associated with effort versus relaxation of commercial broadcasters. Public service broadcasting has the ethos of the pulpit or the classroom. In order to survive and prosper, it must be *popular* and *valued*.

Relevance and mass appeal can only be achieved if broadcasters enter into a pact with their users, that is, they need to be accountable. In the United States, public broadcasters have a direct barometer of accountability, that is, their fundraising efforts. In other countries in which licences are levied, the payment of licence fees provides this feedback. Furthermore, public broadcasters must know their audiences in order to provide programming that is directly relevant. This implies that they need to be more interactive than they have been in the past.

Despite its cost, local programming is seen to be essential to the project of protecting national identity and national culture, as well as providing for the diverse language needs of the audience.

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Competitions, phone-in programmes, public awareness campaigns, interactive programming in education, all provide opportunities for broadcasters to forge links with their audiences. New technology, from cell phones to the Internet, can be harnessed for these purposes. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the German broadcaster and the BBC all use their web pages in constructive ways. The SABC has invested considerable resources in its websites.

Most importantly, authoritativeness and independence must be the heart and soul of a public broadcaster.

Public broadcasters need to be transparent, with widely disseminated public indicators of performance. The SABC has signed a 'shareholder' agreement with the Minister of Communications in her capacity as the representative of the government; furthermore, the Corporation reports to Parliament twice a year. However, there are those who believe that they would do better to consider their audience as the most important shareholder, rather than the government.

We began this chapter by noting that it is impossible to give a single definition of public service broadcasting. However, it is possible to identify a number of key characteristics, which are accepted as common to most international institutions that consider themselves to be public broadcasters.

- Public broadcasters have a mandate to 'inform, educate and entertain'.
- The emphasis on the 'public interest' and the 'public good', means that they tend to put most of their resources into programming that aims to provide relevant information, balance or fairness on controversial social and political issues, while supporting a broadly defined 'educational' agenda.
- In terms of entertainment, public broadcasters need to provide a wide diversity of programmes and services.
- Most importantly, authoritativeness and independence must be the heart and soul of a public broadcaster. Whether it is by means of traditional broadcast news on radio or television, or through interactive web-based news services, those who use information from the public broadcaster must have absolute trust in the integrity of its editorial process.

If all this is accomplished, then we can talk of a productive reinvention of public service broadcasting.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Journalism and the Internet

Arrie Rossouw

Nothing beats the feeling of knowing you have the big scoop that will beat the competitors hands down. Holding that first copy hot off the press, the smell of fresh ink on your hands, you wait nervously for the first copy of the competitor's edition to see whether your story is indeed as exclusive as you have led the editor to believe.

This still happens every day in newsrooms all over the world, but these days the chances are good that the story has been published somewhere in cyberspace long before it has shown up on the front page of the newspaper. Somehow, it's not the same… or is it?

With the advent of the Internet – and the simultaneous arrival of laptop computers and cellphones – things have changed dramatically for daily newspapers. All of a sudden it was not just radio journalists who could file reports from the scene of the crime. For the first time, newspaper journalists had the opportunity to file stories via cellphone and laptop to the World Wide Web with immediate results. They started scooping even the radio guys.

That first time was exciting. The power of the immediacy of filing reports from the accident scene, courtroom, political rally, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, or way past the last deadline of the printed edition, was like a drug to print journalists used to rushing back to the office to file for the next day's paper.

That was almost a decade ago, when everybody who had access to the Internet wanted to set up a website and publish news. One after the other, newspaper brands migrated to the Web – some just to boast a presence there, and many others with great and inflated expectations of massive worldwide audiences and new revenue streams. For most of them, none of those expectations had materialised in the first ten years of Internet accessibility in South Africa.

The adrenalin rush egged us on day and night. On receiving our first web report on the number of hits on the website, we were ecstatic. People out there in cyberspace were actually reading our website!

But South Africa did not stay behind in the Internet race towards faster access, mobile telephony, broadband communication and wireless technology. And most newspapers followed the overseas trends, although on a more modest scale than at the beginning of the Internet explosion in the early nineties. Newspapers did allocate resources and personnel to their Internet businesses, but it was mainly geared towards publishing the daily and weekly print publications online. Only a few brave media companies with fairly deep pockets opted for the Internet portal business with 24/7 news operations to anchor the online content.

I remember those days early in 1997 immediately after my return to Johannesburg from Washington, DC where I had spent three of the most exciting years of my journalistic career as correspondent for Naspers newspapers. I went to my editor at *Beeld*, Johan de Wet, and told him that our newspaper needed a presence on the Web, and preferably in English. He must have thought I'd gone bonkers in America wanting to start an English-language website for an Afrikaans newspaper and update the news 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I must have sounded really excited about what I had experienced with AOL (www.aol.com) and the early Internet developments in the USA. But he bought the idea.

Having been given the green light to start *eBeeld* (www.ebeeld.com), I approached an old colleague, Jan Taljaard, who at the time was running one of the first web-design businesses and his own website in Pretoria, to join me in

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setting up the site and running it from a small office downstairs from the editorial department, tucked away behind the IT section and the computer room. The rest of the editorial staff was not interested in what we were doing, but those who did take an interest were easily convinced to supply content for the new online news service.

We were true pioneers. The two of us did everything, from designing and creating the website, linking it to the FTP server at head office in Cape Town, populating it with English content – mainly tapped from the newswires – and eventually setting up a network of freelancers to translate Afrikaans news reports from *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* into English. The adrenalin rush egged us on day and night. On receiving our first web report on the number of hits on the website, we were ecstatic. People out there in cyberspace were actually reading our website!

After six months, Naspers' new MD Koos Bekker noticed our entrepreneurial efforts and we were invited to become part of a core group of company personnel that would devise a comprehensive and very aggressive Internet strategy for Naspers, which included the upstart Internet division Mweb. In the six months that followed we were the chosen few who had the privilege to start an exciting new venture. The old established newspaper, magazine- and book-publishing company with its humble roots in 1915 was turned upside down and energised with the news of the Internet onslaught led by the energetic and maverick Bekker himself.

When it was announced that News24 (www.news24.com) was to be launched in October 1998 I had no hesitation in accepting the invitation to become the first publisher. It meant, however, that I had to give up my very secure and senior position as deputy editor at *Beeld* to start a news website from scratch with no previous business experience.

The challenge was simply too exciting to let it pass by. Inspired by what I had seen in the USA, and my personal experience with *eBeeld*, I was gripped by Internet fever and its immediacy as a news medium. The journalist in me couldn't resist the thought of creating the ultimate website that would publish breaking news around the clock, running circles around the print and few other online competitors.

Within one year of its launch, News24 became the biggest news website in the country – and today still holds that position. The winning strategy was, and still is, to employ seasoned print journalists to run the operation. They are skilled in producing accurate and quality content at breakneck speed and

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compete against gruelling deadlines – a quality you don't often find outside the newspaper trade and that gave News24 its competitive edge. And the savvy web surfers soon realised and appreciated that.

Since then many Web experiments have come and gone. Naspers alone have launched close to 50 different websites. About half of them were new online brands and the rest were brand extensions of existing print publications. Only one or two didn't make the grade and were either closed down or their content incorporated into other Web products. After six years in existence, only a few of them are profitable, but they still serve their original branding purpose.

Let's be honest, newspapers still face major challenges from the online business, although the real threat is now better understood. On the whole, the future path to survival and prosperity is now fairly clear.

Initially newspaper companies around the world reacted negatively to the digital onslaught. They saw the spectacular expansion of the Web in the nineties as a huge threat and made plans to counter it. But at the start of the new millennium they realised that the best option was to ride the digital wave and seize the opportunities created by it.

Timothy Balding, Director-General of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), summed it up quite aptly when he addressed the association's annual conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2000: 'The new and intensifying competition with the increasingly fragmented nature of media markets is proving to be a remarkable stimulus to newspaper companies, both to play better on their traditional strengths and to exploit to the full the new media opportunities, using all the assets they have gained as dominant players in many information markets.'

Let's be honest, newspapers still face major challenges from the online business, although the real threat is now better understood. On the whole, the future path to survival and prosperity is now fairly clear. The following remarks are by no means a comprehensive overview of the path to success, but should serve as pointers in planning a strategy for growth in the digital age.

- Rule Number One for all print publications should be to do what you do best, i.e. produce quality content. After all these years, that is one of the most important lessons I have learnt.
- Never compromise on your credibility in an effort to get the news out first – stick to the basic rules of journalism regarding accuracy and multiple

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sources. Check the facts before sending off the report into cyberspace. Don't let the adrenalin rush entice you into publishing a breaking news story that could be an embarrassment to the trusted brand into which the company has invested millions.

- Your strength as local newspaper is your local content. All newspapers are basically local in nature. Stick to that and give your readers even more of the relevant local news and information. Leave the international scene to the international online news services.
- Integrate the print and online newsroom, or do not attempt to make a distinction, because it is a superficial divide, which serves no purpose. Treat all the news as content that should be available to publish at any time and in all media platforms. Every print reporter should become a Web reporter as well.
- Extend your trusted brand to the different media platforms with the aim of engaging your readers/customers even more than before. Your existing readers/customers change with the times and their favourite newspaper should be following them or adapting to their new demands. By diversifying onto new platforms, newspapers can reach new markets, such as younger people and online readers not yet buying the print edition.
- Distribution, whether in print or online or via wireless channels, is the most important factor in the survival of newspaper brands. The dictum should be: news any time, any place, anyhow. Customers expect to have access to your content wherever they are, in the form they require, whenever they want it. Content is indeed king, but distribution is King Kong – it means nothing if you have excellent content, but it is not readily available to customers. They will simply log on to a competitor.
- Newspapers must find a balance between the traditional, loyal readers of their print editions and the new, modern generation of young readers who are growing up on Playstation, X-Box, SMS, DVD and mp3. Do things online that you can't do in print, and be more 'hip' or 'cool' in the way you present your content online.
- Online publishing in general has unfortunately become synonymous with shallow, fast information, and snappy breaking news. It need not be like that. Punchy, short news reports do not have to be unsubstantiated gossip and sensationalism. The challenge is to repackage the same quality

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content that has been carefully prepared for print for other distribution channels and platforms into a format fitting that media. The same rule of accuracy applies.

- The dictum in the newspaper industry should be 'create once, publish many'. Create content once and distribute that report or information for publication on as many platforms as you have available. It makes business sense as well if you can sell the same information over and over.
- The Internet has brought with it major advantages. One of them is the ability to manage digitised content and create a digital database of users and subscribers. With it comes the possibility of tailored content, customer-relationship management (CRM), better service and increased loyalty, and hopefully increased circulation and advertising revenue. Therein lies the real beauty of the new digital world.
- Remember, newspaper publishing is no longer about printing ink in 24-hour cycles on chopped-down trees. It is about distributing content on all platforms – print, online, television, radio, cellphone, etc. Journalists have to adapt to this philosophy and the new demands and accompanying working conditions.

Some leading media companies have started to invest in the convergence of the different media platforms within their businesses. Television, radio, print and Internet operations are integrated or the content shared to a greater or lesser extent. Others simply create content once and distribute it on all platforms. The models vary from company to company and from country to country, depending on legislative obstacles.

The concept is perhaps best expressed by Pedro J Ramirez, CEO and publisher of *El Mundo*, one of Spain's leading broadsheets: 'Our mission is not to print news content. It is to distribute content in all platforms. I think that some newspapers may even survive just as a print company but they will not be able to perform fully their objectives as social players, as opinion-formers. To ignore the other media is to renounce delivering news to a much larger audience. We want to reach all our potential customers and we must follow their habits.'

The Afrikaans daily in Cape Town, *Die Burger* (www.dieburger.com), has embarked on a different path. The newspaper has decided to publish its content on all available platforms ('create once, publish many'), whether it owns the

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platform or shares it with outside partners. But this forms part of a strategy to make its content available to its existing customers 'any time, any place, anyhow', and extend its trusted brand to potential new customers not yet reached by the print edition.

The Internet in all its present manifestations – the Web, broadband services, cellphones, e-mail, etc. – forms an integral part of the paper's customer loyalty programme. The Burger-Plus loyalty programme based on a cash-back smart-card system (supported by Infinity) is available to subscribers of the print publication only, and allows them exclusive access to all the Web content (including content not available in print), historical digital archives, photo archives, electronic newsletters, e-mail alert services, SMS competitions, and discount deals with outside partners, advertisers and other Naspers businesses.

At the heart of the programme is the creation of a current digital database of customer information. Through this strategy the paper enhances its relationship with its most loyal customers and encourages two-way communication. It also creates opportunities for advertisers to speak directly to the core of the *Burger* community like never before. For the newspaper's marketing, advertising and editorial departments the information gathered through this programme is worth more than any traditional market research, and it is available at any time.

Furthermore it has created a base from which to launch an e-commerce strategy, create personalised news products and niche online publications, editorial zoning, special editions of the print product, supplements, and many more. An extremely valuable platform has been created to improve the services the paper can deliver to its customers/readers and advertisers.

You might well ask what this has to do with journalism. Apart from creating what is known in the Web jargon as 'stickiness' to the print product, or the brand for that matter, it locks everybody into this unique newsroom/customer community. Journalists get to know their target market better, and that in turn focuses their attention on the kind of news/content they should produce.

The newsroom becomes a multimedia information centre geared towards the gathering and processing of content (more than just news) to distribute in a series of platforms for most of the day and night.

According to the *Innovations in Newspapers 2000 World Report* the future newsroom (and it already exists in many parts of the world) would reflect this reality. Instead of the old process of writing, editing and layout, newsrooms would consist of news desks for story development, content co-ordination, content creation and story writing, media-specific presentation and distribution,

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The more the Web expands into the homes, offices and cars of ordinary people, and the more information they have to digest and rely on, the greater the realisation that quality and credible information is essential.

reader interaction and editorial information management. The report also predicted that the multimedia future would be focused more on 'events' with virtual teams that collect, process and distribute news/content.

But what does all of this boil down to? What does this mean for news reporting, as most of us in the trade know it? And what will become of journalists? Is there a role for newspapers, and journalists and news photographers in the digital future?

The answer is quite clear: the more the Web expands into the homes, offices and cars of ordinary people, and the more information they have to digest and rely on, the greater the realisation that quality and credible information is essential. ZigBee, 3G, Wi-Fi, WiMax, Mobile-Fi, Ultrawideband, ePaper and many more gadgets and future services will come and go, but the provider of information will always be King. And at the core of it all are the hacks typing away at the latest breaking news 24/7 around the globe.

You can have all the bells and whistles of the new, digital universe, but if you do not have useful and compelling content, it means nothing. The bottom line remains: the news industry will always need good, exciting journalism. You need skilled journalists to create excellent content, and content managers and subeditors who can mould that content into different formats fit for distribution everywhere. They are indispensable for the survival of the newspaper in print and online.

Journalists should not fear the Internet or the future. On the contrary, the Internet has created exciting new avenues and opportunities for skilled media professionals – writers, subeditors, photographers, photojournalists and graphic artists. The more the Web expands onto new devices, the more the demand will grow for journalists with different expertise.

And nothing will change that excitement and adrenalin rush when you get that scoop (sorry, content) and pass it on to the content processor (read 'subeditor') for distribution on the first available platform (cellphone, Web, newspaper, e-mail). It doesn't sound the same, but it will be the same old feeling. Nobody can take that away from us!

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The media and transformation

Rehana Rossouw

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I started my career with a lie, one of omission rather than commission. I was a single mother of a nine-month-old baby and, on the advice of my peers, failed to declare this on my CV. I planned to lie deliberately at the interview if I was asked if I had children, but I wasn't asked.

In the 1980s all managements, not just those at newspapers, were prone to believing that single mothers were more likely to be absent from work than any other category of workers. All mothers were believed to be more likely to have divided loyalties – if they had to choose between work and a sick child at home, they were likely to stay home. Mothers weren't eligible for work-related travel: such exciting work was reserved for men, whether they had children or not.

Twenty years later, I work with men who take time off to nurse their children when they are sick. My male colleagues attend school activities during working hours and do some shopping to fill cupboards at home. We all have divided loyalties and manage to produce professional work. But when I started my career, many of the older women in the newsroom had started at the paper as secretaries and were promoted after years of service to produce copy for

the women's page. They did interviews with interesting women in charitable organisations, and published recipes and tips for losing weight.

The vast majority of reporters were male, but women were catching up fast on the subs desk. My first news editor was a woman, though, and a highly confident leader who set high standards. She intimidated me so much that I almost didn't go back to work on my second day. The majority of the staff at the paper I worked at was white when I started my career. There was a smattering of coloured people in the newsroom – and not one African, not even one messenger.

The toilets and the staff canteen were segregated. If you weren't white, you had to get your sandwich and coffee through a window around a corner from where the white staff was served. In my first year the paper sent a coloured reporter with a white photographer on a trip. There wasn't a hotel in the small town where they went to do the story that would give a room to the coloured reporter, so he slept in the company car. This was never reported in the paper and the management did not bother to contact the hotel to complain about the insult.

All of this had to change, of course. Editors of English-language newspapers in South Africa in the 1980s styled themselves as liberals opposed to apartheid. Segregated staff facilities disappeared before petty apartheid was abolished and newspapers began hiring and promoting black and female reporters in larger numbers. Transformation had arrived in South African newsrooms.

Apartheid made South Africa a bizarre and unique place in the world, where racial segregation was imposed on society and the economy long after it became unworkable and made the country the pariah of the world. But South African media institutions were not alone in grappling with issues of transformation and diversity in the 1980s – it was, and remains, a worldwide problem.

Until the last century, journalism was a male-dominated profession. Across the world, the publishers and owners were wealthy, white men. Some media organisations promoted a conservative political viewpoint, others a liberal agenda. Both kinds hired reporters who reflected those viewpoints. In work-places around the globe a hundred years ago, gay people remained in the closet. Journalists are professionals, and not that poorly paid. Even the most left wing of activist journalists are at risk of no longer being the voice of the poor when their salaries give them the lifestyles of the middle class. Christian viewpoints dominate in the media in the Western world. English is the dominant language in South Africa. All of this has to change.

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For decades, media organisations in the USA have been involved in a project to bring greater diversity to their newsrooms. Their aim, simply, is to create newsrooms that resemble the societies they serve. They set numerical targets for staff on ethnicity, race and gender. But this is much easier said than done. The American Society of Newspaper Editors, for instance, began setting targets in 1978. They had hoped 13.5 per cent of staff would reflect minority ethnic groups in the USA by 2001. They also set the ambitious target of 11 per cent of newsroom managers to be representatives of ethnic minorities. But in 2001 the society's census showed they were still far off the mark and the target was changed. They have now set the goal of achieving the same percentage of minorities in newsrooms as reflected in the US population by 2025.

In South Africa, the Employment Equity Act requires that annual reports be sent by all companies to the Department of Labour, specifying targets set for black and female hiring, and their ascension up the corporate ladder. Reporting across industries is poor, and many companies do not achieve the targets they set and pay hefty fines for their failure. There are no current industry-wide statistics available of the representation of women and race groups in the media in South Africa. And an attempt to address the problem found no lasting, or even short-term, solution to the problem of under-representation.

In 1998, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) received a request from the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa to investigate the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sunday Times* for alleged racism. The Commission considered the complaint, decided it fell within their ambit for an investigation, and sent off the allegations to the newspapers for a response. The thrust of the complaint was that the newspapers were racist because, in their coverage of corruption, they gave more space to articles about black people who were allegedly corrupt.

The newspapers denied the allegations and questioned why these two organisations had brought the complaint. The Commission's response was to announce an investigation into racism in all media in South Africa. The ambit of the investigation included an examination of the representation and treatment of racism; and whether the media was 'sensitive to equality as pertains to race, ethnic or social origin, colour, culture, language or birth'.

'We believe that the media will benefit from closer scrutiny so that they can sharpen their capacity to be responsive to the needs of the people and reflect the nature of South African society. We believe that a probe of this nature will engage all South Africans in seeking common solutions to racism and

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Transformation and diversity is not about numbers; it's about changing mindsets and structures of organisations. It is not about having the same number of women and black people in the newsroom as there is in society.

constructing a society free of racism,' the SAHRC announced. It also said it would use its powers to subpoena editors if they failed to co-operate with the investigation and inquiry into racism.

After months of battle with media proprietors about the scope of the investigation, a report into media racism was drafted and hearings were conducted. The SAHRC found that the South African media 'reflect a persistent pattern' of racist expressions and content of writing; that 'such expressions cause or have the effect of causing hurt and pain'; and that South African media could be characterised as racist institutions.

What solutions did they offer after making this damning judgment? 'We urge the South African National Editors Forum and the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism to offer racism-awareness training for journalists at all levels of the industry. We encourage editors to organise newsroom discussion groups from time to time with a view to sensitising journalists to the manner in which racism creeps into their copy. We advise schools of journalism and media studies at universities and technikons to consider a module on racism in the media in the academic training of journalists and media workers.' The SAHRC also came up with the nonsensical suggestion that media organisations 'expose journalists to the cultural diversity that forms the fabric of our society... there are many agencies in our country that organise "plunges" and transcultural dialogues'.

The Commission found there was a need for greater diversity of staff at media organisations. 'Of particular concern was the small number of black subeditors and women in senior management positions,' its report read. It recommended that media management 'vigorously' address the issue of the training and recruitment of black staff, especially subeditors. 'An aggressive recruitment and training campaign with clear time frames – matched by appropriate in-house training and mentoring – is recommended.' The Commission also believed that when diversity in ownership was achieved in the South African media, there would be an automatic diversity in hiring. It offered no insight into how it reached the conclusion that a black man would more happily hire women than a white man. It promised to review the media's annual equity reports, but has said and done very little about the progress –

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or lack thereof – towards transformation since it conducted its hearings and delivered its findings. The Commission's attempt to transform the media, however, is a better one than the annual census project of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Transformation and diversity is not about numbers; it's about changing mindsets and structures of organisations. It is not about having the same number of women and black people in the newsroom as there is in society. It will only be achieved when women and black South Africans – as a starting point for change – have the same voice and power in the organisation as men and white people.

The means of change is as important as the ends, and the two should not ever be confused. The goal is not numerical: the goal is to have a news team that can accurately reflect – in the way they deliver the news – every aspect of society. Quotas accomplish nothing if they are not accompanied by making space for the persons hired or promoted to bring their worldview and way of doing things into a newsroom.

It was only when I reached a management position at a newspaper that my position as a single mother began impacting negatively on my ability to do my job. As a junior climbing the corporate ladder, I relied heavily on the kindnesses of relatives to help carry the load of raising my child. But after leaving them behind when I moved cities because of a promotion into management, I found myself floundering badly with the divided loyalties I suspected my first editor thought all women suffered.

My child was a jock who, thanks to devoted grandparents, aunts and uncles, needed to be on a sports field a minimum of five days out of seven. And extramural sports training, in Johannesburg at least, starts at 5pm or 5.50pm, which makes parents of jocks clockwatchers of the worst sort. I hired an au pair to do a lot of the travelling, which meant that the juicy salary increase I received with the promotion disappeared as soon as it arrived. But even with the increase, I couldn't afford to spend that much on assistance with childrearing.

What I missed out on the most because of my parental duties was the after-work drinks, the socialising that brings the brightest staffers to the attention of their superiors. The only people who can afford

There are still women who believe that they have to 'behave like men' if they are to succeed in climbing the corporate ladder. They dress like men, swear a lot, drink a lot and, nowadays, play golf and smoke cigars.

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to put in the hours at those kinds of functions are those who are single and childless. Those who can afford to stay for drinks after work become the confidantes of their bosses, make the fantastic point they hadn't thought about in the meeting earlier, and become the buddies the boss would like to have on his team when the next promotion becomes available.

I know I have never left the office without finishing the work on my plate for that day, but I certainly couldn't have made a good impression as I was rushing out to make sure my son didn't get kicked off his team for being a few minutes late for a practice. At least I didn't get kicked off my team to get him there!

My first news editor – a woman – chided me because I didn't drink alcohol. She told me that the men at work appreciated a woman who could drink as hard as the men could. Most evenings after work, she could be found at the restaurant known as 'the press club' across the road from the paper's offices, drinking with her colleagues for hours. I rushed home to give my baby a drink as I was still breastfeeding.

It is no use having a diverse staff if we expect them to all think alike and behave the same. You can have a newsroom that looks like the community outside, but if it can't think like that community it would not be able to cover it well.

There are still women who believe that they have to 'behave like men' if they are to succeed in climbing the corporate ladder. They dress like men, swear a lot, drink a lot and, nowadays, play golf and smoke cigars. Hopefully, women like these are now in the minority and this trait is not expected from women in management who have the authority to hire women.

All organisations need women's unique abilities. One of my editors used to call me 'the social worker' because I always knew who had a drinking problem, had split up with a partner, or had financial problems. But I only knew these things when they impacted on the staffers' ability to do their jobs – monitoring work performance was my responsibility. And if it needed a 'social worker' to help overcome the personal problems so the person could reach their potential at work, I was happy to give that assistance. I brought some mothering to work, and it helped me get people working well. Fathering would work just as well.

It is no use having a diverse staff if we expect them to all think alike and behave the same. You can have a newsroom that looks like the community outside, but if it can't think like that community it would not be able to cover

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it well. It is much more time-efficient to have a newsroom that thinks alike and acts the same. In the rush to deadline, efficiency can sometimes be everything. But where there is time available to discuss a story treatment, all reporters should have the space to express their viewpoint.

Every journalist should be able to report on anything, notwithstanding the beat to which they are assigned. A Muslim reporter should be capable of reporting fairly and accurately on Jewish affairs. Male reporters are perfectly capable of producing a sensitive story about a rape. White reporters should be assigned to stories about racism. It would be immoral (and probably illegal) to hire reporters of a certain gender and culture and then to 'ghetto-ise' them into reporting on their own culture and gender exclusively.

Diversity is about looking good but transformation is providing the intellectual space so that staff members can bring their own outlook and culture into the working environment. Editors, like most humans, typically appreciate people they understand, who talk like them, act like them and attend the same church. But editors who want their staff to think like them are doing society a disservice. Editors with hierarchical decision-making structures are never going to ensure that all voices are heard and reflected in the news product.

In the early rush to transform newsrooms in South Africa, black journalists from the now defunct 'alternative press' who had not been denied management experience because of the colour of their skins, were earmarked for 'fast-tracking' in the mainstream media. They were sent off for crash courses in management and returned, in some cases, to the same positions at the mainstream papers they held at their former, progressive newspapers. A hallmark of the alternative press in South Africa was the democracy practised in their newsrooms, some more than in others. However, some of the 'fast-tracked' black management entered their new positions at the for-profit publications like little Hitlers, so determined to succeed on behalf of their race that they forgot how important it was to be democratic, to give their staff a voice.

How often do we hear editors pronounce 'but I think...' and 'in my experience...'? With the plethora of media available to consumers nowadays, it's no longer good enough to produce media that reflect only the editor's viewpoint and experiences. In South Africa, especially, where the race debate has hardly started to be addressed honestly and where race taints everything, producing media that only reflect the editor's outlook on life is dangerous and wrong – even if the editor is a black female.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tomorrow's news

Irwin Manoim

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The future of news is within easy reach. Dig into your pocket and take out your cellphone. Maybe you're the old-fashioned type who thinks the purpose of a phone is to make calls. Younger and more switched-on people have cellphones that download music, snap photos and videos, tune in to radio, receive e-mails, and offer many other features about which your children will be able to tell you more. Journalists, a technophobic lot, rarely own such overstuffed electronic trinkets. They're meant for corporate blue suits, or love-struck teenagers, or shopping-mall bimbos. But whether we like them or not, overstuffed cellphones are the future of journalism.

Pundits of a wireless new age in which electronics replace print have earned a bad reputation. Many of us no longer go out much in public. The newspapers that prosper today are the ones that made least effort yesterday to keep up with each 'next big thing'. In the paperless office, the waste bins overflow with crumpled bits of 80gsm Mondi Rotatrim. And then there's the World Wide Web. It has not yet driven a single dead-tree newspaper out of business.

Futurology, in short, has sunk to the same low ebb, as, say, political commentary.

The truth is – and it hurts deeply to say this – the World Wide Web has always been a lousy medium for a leisurely read of the news. It requires sitting at a desk, clicking, waiting, clicking, waiting. Paper, by comparison, offers a delight no one had noticed until the Internet came along: 'tactile pleasure', traditionalists like to call it. They mean flipping from page to page, which, for most readers, is the nearest they come to actually reading the product. Paper is cheap, multipurpose (wrap chips, line the budgie cage, clean the car engine) and can be read in bed, on the loo or – given sharp elbows and considerable courage – in a taxi.

As you read this, cellphone and computer manufacturers are converging upon the same point. Each is midwife to an electronic mongrel that is both cellphone and PalmPilot.

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In defence of the pundits, they have long said that electronic news won't take off until a digital gadget offers the same portability and cost efficiency as a newspaper. The electronic device has to be small enough to fit into a jacket pocket or, better still, teensy enough to pass as a piece of fashionable jewellery. It should be possible to read it in the bath without fatal consequences or under a beach umbrella on a tropical island. And it should deliver the news at prices that compare with paper.

The most devout news futurologist is an American journalist-turned-professor named Roger Fidler, who for more than 20 years has been dreaming up Dick Traceyesque devices, unperturbed by their failure to sweep the market. Fidler first proposed an electronic newspaper in 1981, a time when many of his fellow journalists were still thumping the keys on their Remingtons. The Fidler concept resembled a popular toy, the 'Etch-A-Sketch', a tablet on which children drew disappointingly scraggly pictures by twiddling two knobs. Ten years later, he built a working prototype of a tablet-styled PC for reading newspapers, a design that is notable because, of all his concepts, this is the one that has materialised. Sort of.

The TabletPC, a near-identical twin to the Fidler tablet, has been on sale in various flavours, colours and brand names for almost two years. It looks… like an adult version of an Etch-A-Sketch. Plug in a keyboard, and the TabletPC is a conventional Windows PC laptop. Pull off the keyboard, and it can be

scribbled on like an old-fashioned jotter – but a jotter connected by wireless to e-mail and the company network.

The TabletPC was largely conceived by Microsoft, and is therefore not to be lightly dismissed. Microsoft imagined it as a handy device for people who stroll about a lot while taking notes, like nurses, traffic cops, building-site managers or supermarket shelf packers. No mention here of journalists. Or of digital newspapers. These omissions have not fazed Fidler, who has been hired by another software giant with a vested interest in the publishing business, Adobe Systems. His brief: to produce prototype newspapers for the TabletPC.

What's remarkable about Fidler's TabletPC newspapers is that they are unremarkable. They have headlines, text in columns, nasty retail advertising at the bottoms of pages, and arrow keys to flip forwards or backwards – not quite 'tactile pleasure', but close enough. In short, the ground-breaking digital newspapers look suspiciously like their paper cousins. That's the whole idea, says Fidler, arch nemesis of paper: people are, after all, rather fond of paper.

Why should the TabletPC-style newspaper succeed where the Web did not? TabletPC readers subscribe to the newspaper, which is delivered to them by e-mail. If they don't pay, they don't get it. The newspaper sits on the hard drive of the tablet, which makes flipping from page to page as rapid as reading paper – there's no Web-like click-'n-snooze. There's also no Web-like temptation to read two articles and then surf off somewhere else. And the TabletPC can be read on a train, in bed, or in the Gobi desert.

Sounds terrific, but now for the really tough questions: Do you own a TabletPC? If not, do any of your colleagues own a TabletPC? If not, have you ever been flagged down by a TabletPC-wielding traffic cop? Alas, the TabletPC has not blown the lid off the market. It costs almost a third more than a conventional laptop, which is a third more than people are willing to pay for the modest convenience of scribbling notes on the screen. In South Africa, where wireless connectivity is just one notch above nonexistent, there's even less reason to have one. The TabletPC may well have its day, but that day is not tomorrow.

Which is why another group of news futurologists are putting their money on a different portable device: the mobile phone. US publishing consultant Vin Crosbie has argued that nobody will buy an electronic device just to read the news. But people might choose to read news on a device bought for other reasons.

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As you read this, cellphone and computer manufacturers are converging upon the same point. Each is midwife to an electronic mongrel that is both cellphone and PalmPilot. The device is the size of a traditional spiral-bound reporter notebook, small enough to slide into a pocket, but bigger than a cellphone, and with a larger screen than a Palm. The device is a cellphone, a radio, a camera, a music and video player. It will offer e-mail, Web browsing, a diary and a calendar, and has a screen sophisticated enough to write on and display lots of small text. If you have not already seen them advertised, expect to see them soon.

The notion of a cellphone delivering the news does not sit well with most journalists, just as the notion of a television set delivering the news did not sit well with their grandfathers. Which is why the first companies to provide news services on next-generation cellphones tend to come from outside journalism. They have begun by providing a narrow range of specialist information: stock prices, sports and racing results, traffic and weather reports, entertainment listings, classifieds.

Can technology shape the news? Journalists affect a professional indifference to the grubby technical processes that transform their musings into products called newspapers.

The selling points are the medium's ability to deliver faster than radio, in packages customised to individual taste, on a device that is almost always within reach of the user. The 'content' is directory-style: lots of statistics, not many full sentences, zero interpretation. Not journalism, in other words.

So, nothing to worry about. Except that, for the past century, the public's need to buy newspapers to provide stock prices, sports results, weather, entertainment and classifieds, has been a large part of what has kept the industry alive. The danger of the cellphone news device is that it will nibble away at the boundaries of what has traditionally been newspaper turf. With each nibble, readers will be lost.

Which one will win out, the TabletPC with Fidler's newspaper-like newspaper, or the cellphone version? In the longer term, the answer is: neither. One of the other technologies over which Fidler enthuses is called electronic paper. Electronic paper is not new: it predates the personal computer. It was invented by a Xerox researcher named Nick Sheridon in the early seventies, and, like a great deal of other ground-breaking Xerox research, was deemed by his superiors to have no evident value, and shelved until the late nineties.

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Electronic paper bears only a passing resemblance to its wood-pulp ancestor, and has a thickness and texture more akin to leather. The electronic ink consists of tiny pigment beads floating in an oily suspension above a rubbery mat, switched on and off by faint electric currents. Unlike the displays on notebook computers, notoriously difficult to read in poor light, electronic paper is no more difficult to read than ordinary paper. It is also flexible, and can be bent and rolled very tightly without breaking.

Tomorrow's electronic paper device could perhaps resemble a Cuban cigar, a small tube easily carried in a pocket. Pull a tag on the cigar, and out rolls the electronic paper, rather like a medieval scroll emerging from its cover. The sheet of electronic paper will be the size of a magazine, to be scribbled upon with a digital pen or read like conventional paper – but it will be paper with all the power and connectivity of a personal computer. It will be four times brighter than today's laptop screens, and it will be capable of displaying full-motion television.

Once manufacturers have mastered the technology, prices should fall steadily, because electronic paper will be easier to mass-produce than the fiddly processes of today's multipart laptop computer screens. And because electronic paper uses one hundredth the power of today's displays, batteries will be smaller and the whole device lighter. The pundits will have their holy grail – an affordable device small enough to fit in a pocket, but big enough to give decent display to pictures and text. But enough of technology: what are the implications for journalism?

Can technology shape the news? Most journalists affect a professional indifference to the grubby technical processes that transform their musings into products called newspapers. But several doctorates have been earned on the thesis topic of how news has been shaped by changing technologies. Newspapers didn't exist until movable type was invented, and mass-circulation newspapers required the invention of high-speed rotary presses. The cellphone-like news devices of the not-too-distant future may prove demanding taskmasters. This is a medium that will always need to be first with the news, around the clock, 365 days a year. Hollow-eyed electronic journalists will find themselves filing at all kinds of strange hours. Those aged over 35 will, on doctors' orders, downscale to less stressful occupations. Electronic journalists may have to rediscover some of the skills of yesteryear's Fleet Street evening tabloids. They will need to specialise in the rapid delivery of short, breaking news stories, no more than three or four paragraphs long, and updated frequently.

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The story is no longer a single article, here today and forgotten tomorrow. It is one link in a chain of related articles, sounds and images that provide a broader context to a topic, some of which have already been produced, some of which are yet to be conceived.

The ink on a printed page just sits there, but the ink on an electronic page can jive from margin to margin and sing in stereo. Multimedia noise and buzz are prime draws of the Internet. But not for old-fashioned journalists. Die-hard print journalists do not like pictures that move, or worse, speak: there is something indecent about them, undermining the gravitas of the prose.

Few print journalists have the training for multimedia work, or any appreciation of how words and moving images might work together. But the journalism schools, in some respects a decade ahead of the newsrooms, are already churning out graduates who have multimedia talents – and multimedia passions. Television skills and television equipment will invade 'newspaper' newsrooms. The next generation may cross new creative boundaries in bringing text together with video. They'll have to – the audiences will expect it.

Tomorrow's journalists will also need to master skills already required of today's online journalists. They will need to revisit their understanding of journalism's primary artefact, 'the story'. The story is no longer a single article, here today and forgotten tomorrow. It is one link in a chain of related articles, sounds and images that provide a broader context to a topic, some of which have already been produced, some of which are yet to be conceived. A newspaper article is dried ink upon pulped-wood mash. An electronic article is alive: click the restaurant review and find it on a map; click the profile and contact the person. A print article is information; an electronic article is both information and public service.

Will digital media kill print? The advent of television did not exterminate either the newspaper industry or radio. But there was most certainly a bloody slaughter. Radio was forced out of its prime position in the centre of the family lounge, and exiled to the motorcar, where it reinvented itself as a medium for commuters. Many famous newspaper titles died. Those that survived lost much of their capacity to break news, and sacrificed a chunk of their advertising revenues. Electronic news may have similar effects on print. In the long run, paper can't compete with a medium that eliminates the expenses of presses, delivery trucks and retail outlets. Newspapers will die, and those that survive will become less deadline-driven and increasingly magazine-like, heavy on

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comment. Many journalists may even find them more congenial environments than before. Broadsheets will disappear. Fleet Street's 'quality' papers are already experimenting with tabloid formats, and where they lead, South African papers will surely follow. At least one major South African title has quietly produced a full-scale dummy of a tabloid version.

Tomorrow's newspapers may deliberately choose to be text heavy, giving less space to graphics and photographs, leaving the domain of visual impact to the electronic media. But there will be nowhere to hide from the electronic media. A news service delivered to a TabletPC or an electronic-paper device can just as easily devote itself to lengthy texts of comment and analysis. Indeed, one scenario is that there will be a great many such electronic papers, each narrowly specialist like a newsletter, commenting on a single area: a daily newspaper about housing, another about water, another delivering digital news about digital news.

But if people like reading news printed on paper, then why are newspapers vulnerable? The answer is classified advertising, the weakest link in today's printed newspaper. Among the Internet's talents are two that no other medium can match: blink-of-an-eye searches through voluminous information; and one-to-one, unmediated interactivity between users. These talents have produced successes such as auction sites (eBay) and job-hunting sites (monster.com). Together, auction sites and job-hunting sites are ripping the guts out of newspaper classifieds. In 2002, the year immediately after the notorious dot-bomb crash, US newspapers lost a quarter of their jobs advertising to online jobs sites like monster.com. By May 2003, the Newspaper Association of America was advising members to treat printed classifieds as secondary, and concentrate urgently on building their online classifieds strength. By early 2004, market research indicated that 45 per cent of job seekers in the USA went straight to the Internet rather than newspaper classifieds.

What about South Africa? The best-known recruitment site is Career-Junction, started in 1997, and bought out three years later by Johnnic and Adcorp; the former a newspaper owner, the latter a significant player in recruitment advertising. CareerJunction aggregates the recruitment advertising from such Johnnic publications as the *Sunday Times*, *Business Day*, the *Financial Mail* and *ComputingSA*, as well as the *Mail & Guardian*. Each month, around 12 000 jobs go online at CareerJunction, more than any newspaper classifieds section can hope to compete with. And each month, CareerJunction draws around 115 000 'unique users' (in plain English, that means 'different

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The rise and fall of successive waves of technology have repeatedly reshaped the news environment.

people'), most of whom revisit the site every other day. According to Mark Buwalda, MD of the country's major search engine, Ananzi, recruitment has beaten sex into top spot in the league of most favoured search categories on the South African Internet.

CareerJunction still relies on print to supply the bulk of its advertising, an electronic parasite, if you wish, sucking the blood of its paper host. But parasites have a nasty habit of killing their hosts. In the not-so-distant future, general-interest dailies and weeklies will see the life ebbing from their classified sections. The local media conglomerates, heavily invested in electronic media, have taken the necessary steps to mind their own backs. That doesn't make the newspapers they own any less vulnerable. The Independent group, for example, which once grew rich on fat classified advertising sections, will one day be obliged to complete a process started years ago, and scale down to a single national daily produced in a single newsroom… masquerading under different names in different cities.

'The Big Gorilla'… South African magazines have always had to compete for shelf space with intruders from abroad, like *Time*, *GQ*, *Esquire* and the like. But South African newspapers are accustomed to having the field to themselves. The first hint of looming danger came recently, when the *Financial Times* began printing a Johannesburg edition, first on a small laser press, and then, when demand outstripped expectations, on a conventional press.

The Internet provides a taste of what is to come next. Despite the best efforts of South African publishers, most South African Web users prefer to spend their time visiting the big hitters abroad like Amazon and eBay, CNN and the BBC, Google and Yahoo. The truth is that American sites are way richer, way smarter, way more enticing than our own.

Tomorrow's global electronic news market will be dominated by a few huge corporations, none of them based here. Microsoft, for example, is already a Web-publishing power. The company has the resources and the will to produce a global news title. For local coverage in target countries, it might enter arrangements with indigenous media players. With no more than a modest presence in South Africa, Microsoft could undercut local players on advertising charges and cover price. Local editorial would be confined to the 'big stories', and for the rest – fashion, music, film-star gossip, horoscopes and cars –

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generic stories pumped across from the USA will keep readers happy. After all, American pulp has already kept readers happy for half a century or more.

Next-generation television and radio could be even more profoundly affected. Broadcast is the only section of the media that is heavily regulated. A thicket of red tape controls shareholding and foreign ownership, with the aim of increasing diversity and empowerment. But none of that red tape will be of the slightest help to our government a few years hence, when increasingly powerful digital television and radio stations reach local audiences from beyond our borders. Let's hope our local media can stand up to the best of US competition as successfully as Nandos and Steers have stood up to MacDonalds and Wimpy.

'The digital divide'… As the digital media become more powerful and pervasive, critics fear the creation of a divided world of information 'haves' and 'have nots', in which lack of access to computers isolates the populations of developing nations from the global debate. To hear the critics, one would imagine the information divide was a recent evil, like oil spills. But, in fact, there's always been an information divide – much of the world's population have never learnt to read. And the printed newspapers of African cities, which rarely sell more than 40 000 copies, are no more available to the rural peasantry than Google.

What about South Africa, where government has invested considerably in media-diversity projects designed to bring information to the disadvantaged? Could an influx of yuppie digital devices over the next few years create a new class stratification? The essential requirement for tomorrow's digital media will be sophisticated wireless communication networks. South Africa has only just started installing these. Even when fully functional, they are likely to be priced beyond the means of the poor.

But, while our Internet networks are years behind, our cellphone networks are right up in front with the best. Within a couple of years, the entire country – remote rural areas included – should have cellphone access. By 2008, say the experts, there will be 20 million cellphone users in South Africa – more than half the adult population. Those pervasive phones will one day give everyone, rural people included, access to digital news, which may even be cheaper than the local paper. We should never forget the lesson of radio, which started life seven decades ago as an amusing diversion for wealthy city dwellers, and is today the most effective mass medium for the poor.

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Most people find the future frightening, and a future in which machines are increasingly powerful is all the more intimidating. The rise and fall of successive waves of technology have repeatedly reshaped the news environment. Each new invention – printing itself, rotary presses, newspaper photography, newspapers in colour, electronic editing systems, the Internet – has drawn predictions of civilisation's imminent decline. In each case, the fears seem plausible at the time, but appear exaggerated or even a little foolish when we re-examine them today. New technology creates, and also destroys. Old obstacles are swept away, and new avenues for innovation open up. But certain values and skills are always lost; generally values that older people cherish and younger people do not. Expect the next generation of digital media to be no different.

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ACRONYMS

AFP	Agence France Presse
ANC	African National Congress
AP	Associated Press
APTV	Associated Press Television
ARDA	Agricultural Rural Development Authority (Zimbabwe)
CRM	customer-relationship management
DASA	DaimlerChrysler Aerospace South Africa
DVD	digital video decoders
EADS	European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company
HPI	Hire Purchase Information
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IAMCR	International Association for Media and Communication Research
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change (Zimbabwe)
NPR	National Public Radio (USA)
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PAGAD	People Against Gangsterism and Drugs
PBS	Public Broadcast Services
PSB	Public Service Broadcasting
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SANEF	South African National Editors' Forum
SAPA	South African Press Association
SCI	Social Cohesion and Identity Research Programme
SOE	stated-owned enterprises
WAN	World Association of Newspapers
WAP	wireless application programming
WED	Writing Editing and Design
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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Ruth Teer-Tomaselli studied English Literature and Political Science (BA Hons.), followed by an MA (cum laude) in Development Studies, both at Wits, and has a PhD in Media Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her current research interests include the political economy of broadcasting and telecommunications in southern Africa; programme production on television and radio, particularly community radio; and the role of media in development. She has served as a director on the boards of the SABC, and as a radio broadcaster on both East Coast Radio and a community station, Durban Youth Radio. She is currently Professor of Culture, Communication and Media Studies (as well as Programme Director for Undergraduate Studies) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. She holds the UNESCO-Orbicom Chair in Communication for southern Africa, and is past-Vice President of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR).

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Joe Thloloe was, until recently, Editor-in-Chief at e-tv, the country's only independent television channel, responsible for news and current-affairs programming. He started his 44-year career in journalism in 1961 on the *World*, which was banned by the National Party government in 1977. He then continued to work for the newspaper's 'descendants' – *Post Transvaal* and *Sowetan*, where he was Managing Editor – as well as for *Post*, *Drum* and the *Rand Daily Mail*. With the demise of apartheid, he ventured into broadcast journalism, first as Input Editor and then Editor-in-Chief at SABC Television News.

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